

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION

June/July
2008

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

Kung Fu Panda: DreamWorks Mixes Mayhem and Martial Arts

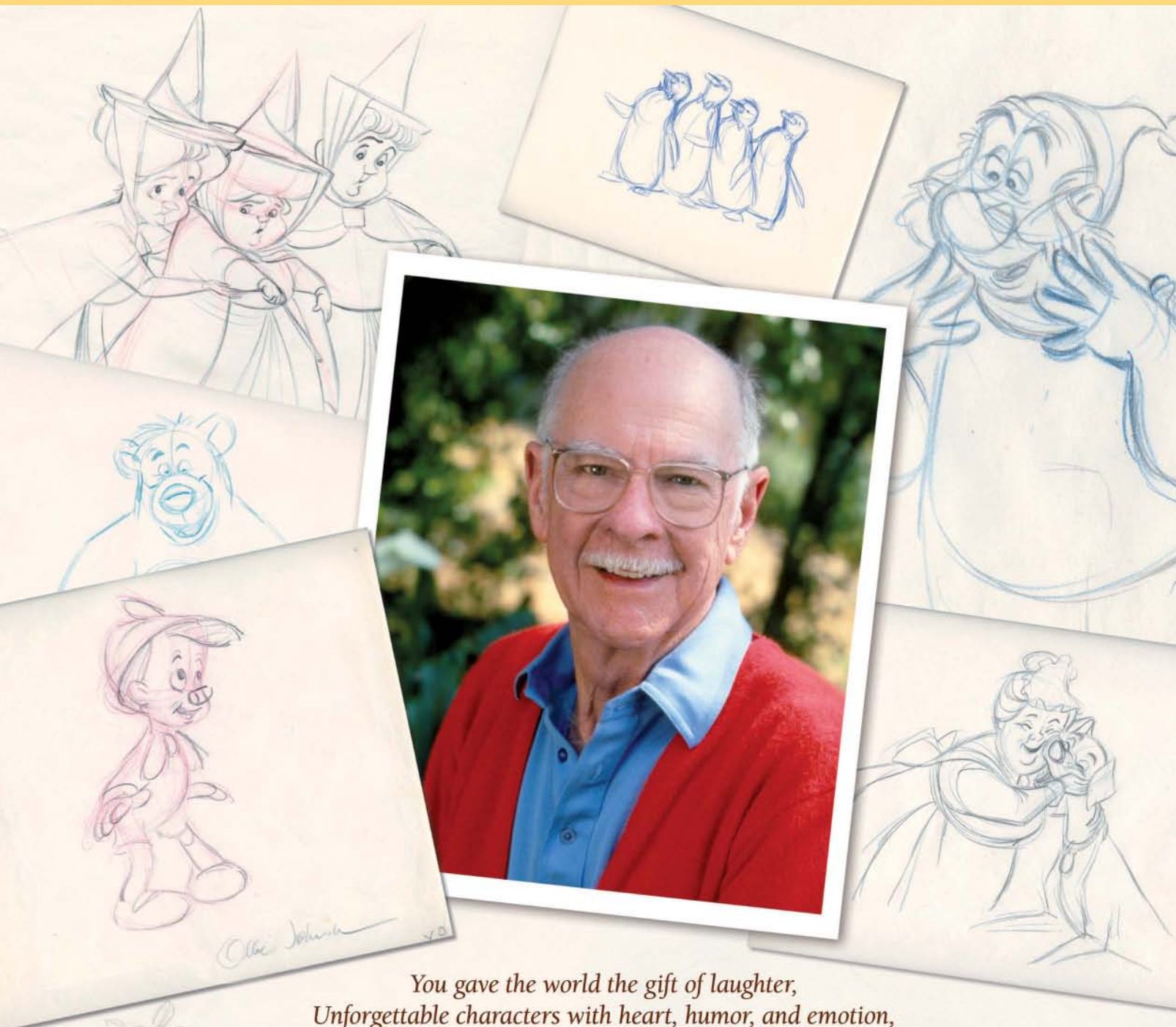


Summer Movie
Spectacular Issue:
WALL•E,
Speed Racer and
Space Chimps

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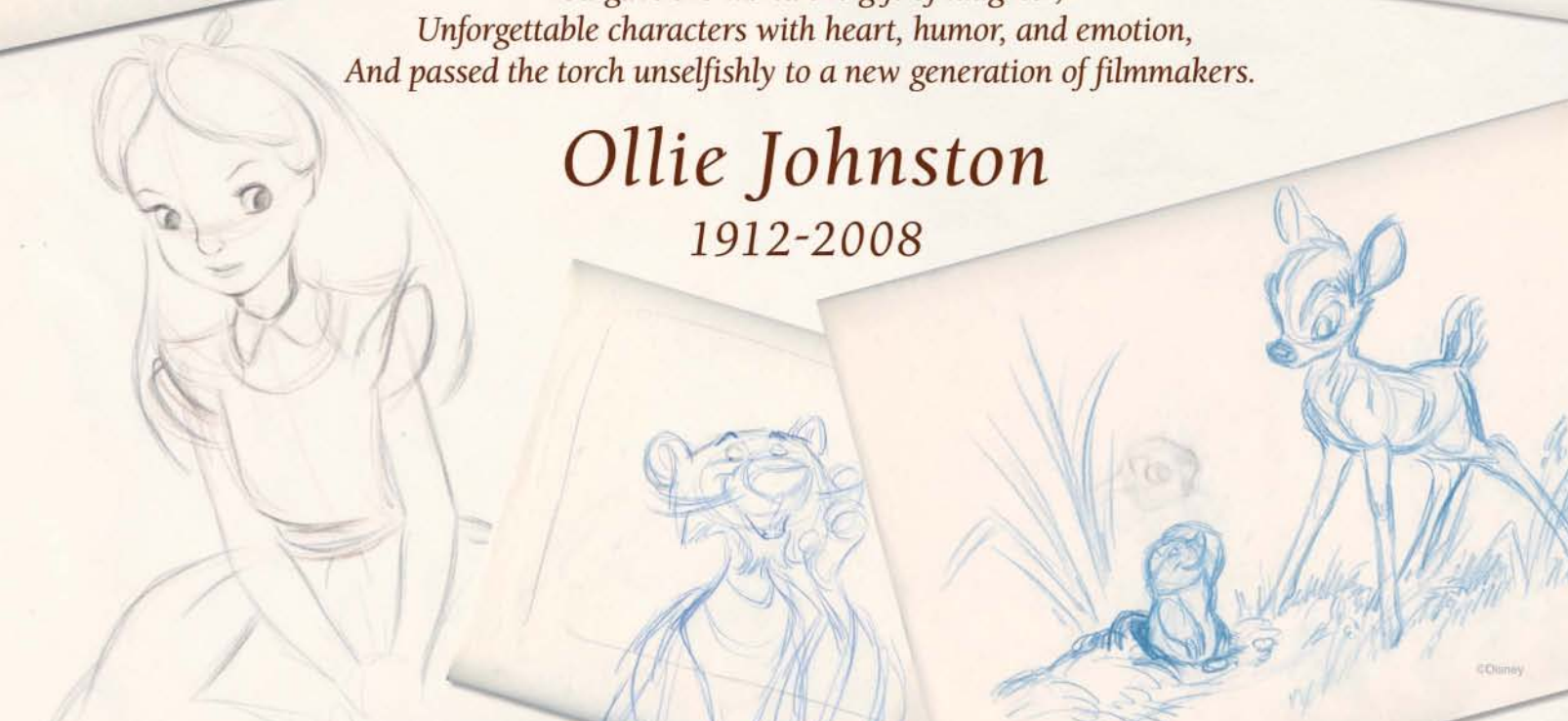
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*You gave the world the gift of laughter,
Unforgettable characters with heart, humor, and emotion,
And passed the torch unselfishly to a new generation of filmmakers.*

Ollie Johnston

1912-2008



ANIMATION MAGAZINE

Volume 22, Issue 6, Number 185, June/July 2008

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TS. Elliot was so right when he said April was the cruelest month. The animation community lost the last surviving member of Disney's beloved Nine Old Men, Ollie Johnston last month. Although he will be greatly missed by his many friends, fans and family members, he left the world a timeless legacy of animated classics, which will be cherished as long as kids and grown-ups can enjoy movies in one form or another. I don't know any serious animation fan or artist who doesn't treasure Johnston and Frank Thomas tome *Disney Animation: Illusion of Life* as some sort of a magical relic.

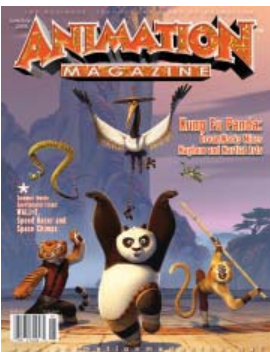
We were also saddened by the sudden death of Toronto-based animator Andy Knight, who founded Red Rover Studios and was deeply admired and loved by his colleagues and friends around the world. We were honored to include remembrances of both artists in this issue.

As much as we love celebrating the achievements of past artists, we also enjoy offering sneak previews of projects that will come to theaters in the near future. That's why we've scored great interviews with the creative teams behind Pixar's *WALL•E*, DreamWorks Animation's *Kung Fu Panda* and Fox/Vanguard's *Space Chimps*. Our special movie-themed issue also includes an info-packed dossier of all the projects in the pipeline that we hope you find useful all year long. (For all you collectors out there: this double-issue has two special bonus covers—one featuring *WALL•E* and the other *Kung Fu Panda*—so if you're die-hard fans, email us and we'll send you the version you prefer.)

We know a lot of our readers like to know what to expect at the wonderful Annecy Festival in June, so we hope you enjoy our special preview of this unique event. If you are staying home, then visit www.animationmagazine.net for up-to-the-minute reports from the French fest. Flying can be hazardous to your mental health these days, but someone's got to do it, right?

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
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Quote of the Month

"Ollie had such a huge heart and it came through in all of his animation, which is why his work is some of the best ever done. Ollie was a great teacher and mentor to all of us. I can't imagine what animation would be like today without him passing on all of the knowledge and principles that the 'nine old men' and Walt Disney developed. He taught me to always be aware of what a character is thinking, and we continue to make sure that every character we create at Pixar and Disney has a thought process and emotion that makes them come alive."



-- John Lasseter, CCO for Walt Disney and Pixar Animation Studio and longtime friend of Ollie Johnston

(1912-2208), the last of Nine Old Men who passed away last month.

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Ollie Johnston

**Your countless contributions
to the art of animation
have been an inspiration to us all.**

SONY PICTURES
animation



The Animation Planner

June

1 Check out **Vicon's Online Film Festival** all month long, which showcases the winners of this year's stop-motion competition (www.vicon.com/filmfestival).



3 Among the numerous animated DVD titles begging for kids' attention today are *Go Diego Go! Great Gorilla!*, *Kenny the Shark: Catch A Wave Vol. 3* and *Wonder Pets! Save the Nursery Rhyme!* For older folks, there's *The Animation Show, Vol. 3*.

6 Let the summer movie derby begin! Today, we can catch DreamWorks' *Kung Fu Panda* in theaters, directed by Mark Osborne and John Stevenson.



7-8 New York's **Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art Festival** takes place in Soho's historic Puck building (www.moccany.org).



9-14 Check out some of the world's best shorts and features at the famous **Annecy International Animated Film Festival** and market (www.annecy.org).



10-12 In N.Y.C. this week: the toy-packed **Licensing International Expo**, held at the Javits Center (www.licensingexpo.com).

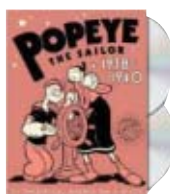


10 Stay away from those annoying TV reruns with fun new DVD releases such as *Comedy Central's TV Funhouse* and *Fantastic Four: World's Greatest Heroes: The Complete First Season* which arrive in stores today. Also, find out who this year's big innovators are at the **12th Annual Webby Awards** held in New York, NY (www.webbyawards.com).



13 Look! Everyone's favorite brooding/angry schizophrenic Marvel superhero gets to battle evil and make his girlfriend worry in *The Incredible Hulk*, starring Ed Norton, Liv Tyler and Tim Roth. Also, Director M. Night Shyamalan desperately tries to capture the old magic with his new summer flick, *The Happening*.

17 Three new DVD arrivals let us forget about global warming for a few hours: *Popeye the Sailor 1938-1940, Vol. 2*, *Inspector Gadget: Big Little Problem* and *The Jungle Book 2: Special Edition*.



17-20 Singapore is the place to be this week as it hosts the **CG Overdrive** expo, devoted to the art and commerce of computer-generated animation (www.cgoverdrive.com).



19-20 The netizens of the world will show up at Manchester, England's **b.TWEEN 08: Interactive Media Forum** (www.just-b.com/btween).



19-29 The **Los Angeles Film Festival** promises to showcase several new cool animated shorts and features, if we get lucky (www.laflmfest.com).



20 Steve Carell and Ann Hathaway go for big laughs in the big-screen adaptation of TV's *Get Smart* series.



24 Stay inside and work on your ghostly pallor while watching *Death Note Vol. 5*, out on DVD today.



27 All hail the great Pixar robot: Fans finally get to see Andrew Stanton's much-anticipated feature *WALL•E* in theaters today.

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

Books We Love



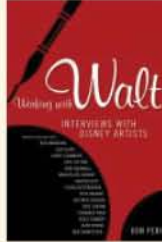
Working with Walt: Interviews with Disney Artists

By Don Peri

[University Press of Mississippi, paperback, \$22]

When noted Disney artist Herb Ryman was interviewed for Don Peri's new book, he told the author, "Disney was rather an unsophisticated, quite simple person ... a very normal, ordinary person with a genius for knowing and caring what people wanted and what they could enjoy." Ryman isn't alone in his praise and precise descriptions of the man and his empire. Studio legends such as Eric Larson, Wilfred Jackson, Ben Sharpsteen, Dick Huemer, Clarence Nash (voice of Donald Duck), Marcellite Garner (voice of Minnie Mouse), Ken O'Connor, Floyd Gottfredson, Les Clark, Ken Anderson, Jack Cutting, Harper Goff and Larry Clemmons all share their own stories about Disney in this wonderful collection.

Peri wisely lets the artists do all the talking in a simple Q & A format, and it's truly impossible not to be moved by the stories and heartfelt passion this group of artists expresses for both Disney and the art of animation. In his introduction, the author mentions that some of his interviewees were retired and living modestly. "But for the time we were together, they generously poured out their memories of working with Walt. I would see



them in the present but hear them in their youth." Perhaps that's why reading the book creates the giddy euphoria of riding a time machine back to the golden days of the toon empire and the man who built it.

The Art of WALL•E

By Tim Hauser and Andrew Stanton

[Chronicle Books, hardcover, \$40]



If you're anything like the artists, animation fanatics and Pixar aficionados we know (and who isn't a fan these days), you've been counting the days until Andrew Stanton's summer feature WALL•E opens in theaters. Well, the movie doesn't officially open until June 27, but Chronicle Books' gorgeous look at the making of the film hits a bookstore near you on April 30. Penned by Disney studio alum Tim Hauser and the Stantonmeister himself, the generously illustrated book is another one of those friggin' amazing collections whose pages we wish we could wrap around ourselves each and every day. You know the drill. Buy it. Read it. Touch the pages. Look at the immaculate illustrations. Find a home for it on your coffee table next to the previous years' books about the art of *Ratatouille*, *Cars*, *The Incredibles*, *Finding Nemo*, etc. Just live it, OK?

—Ramin Zahed

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A Beloved Animator's Unexpected Death

Andy Knight, 1962-2008

Last month, after wrapping a very successful MIPTV market in France, beloved animator and director Andy Knight and founder of Toronto's Red Rover studio died suddenly from a brain aneurysm. Deeply loved by his family, a world-wide circle of friends, colleagues and his extended family at Red Rover; he will be missed but never forgotten.

Andy, along with his wife Linzi, founded Red Rover, a film and animation studio in London, England in 1992. In 1996 he opened Disney Canada to direct the feature film *Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas* under the condition that Disney would relocate the entire Red Rover Studios to Toronto. He received the Best Director Feature Straight-to-Video Award [World Animation Celebration] and the Annie for Outstanding Achievement in an Animated Feature.

Upon completion of the Disney feature, Red Rover began generating commercials, short films and television series. Andy was highly regarded and recognized with numerous awards for his extraordinary talent, constantly setting the bar for animation. Along with his contributions to the commercial industry, he was the creator of Nelvana/Teletoon's 1997 series *Ned's Newt* (with Michael Burgess) and the *Get Ed* Jetix series (2005-06) and the multi-award winning 2003 short *Plumber*.

By all accounts, Andy was a loyal and generous friend and mentor who set a lot of people on their paths in the industry, and saw potential everywhere. "Andy's quiet confidence motivated and energized everyone who knew him," says Bill Spear, his long-time friend and colleague. "He remains



a wonderful example of how we can all grow as artists and live as people."

Greg Court, another friend and Red Rover animator echoes Spear's feelings. "I still have trouble imagining Andy isn't here. I would sometimes sit hypnotized watching Andy draw or paint. It was as if all the lines were already on the page and he was simply making them visible for the rest of us to see. It truly was mesmerizing. He was an

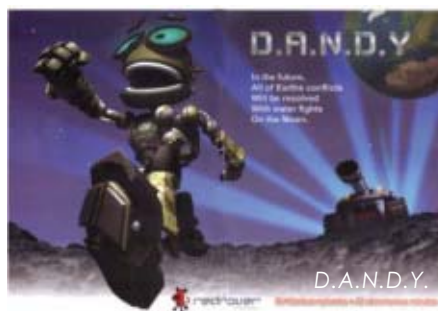
incredible talent and my very close friend. I'm sure going to miss him."

Andy's friend and Red Rover exec producer Raph Quirno also acknowledges his knack for recognizing the potential in every-

one. "He surrounded himself with top quality talent and expected nothing but the best from us," he notes. "He considered all of us leaders in our respective skill sets and he created a strong team that has and still can follow through with fulfilling his vision. He will be missed tremendously."

At this year's MIPTV, Andy was introducing *D.A.N.D.Y.*, a new CG-animated series about a peace-loving robot that lives on the Moon in the year 2080. Those who were lucky to preview it say that the project has the makings of a huge international hit: It was funny, looked fantastic and gave Pixar's summer robot a good run for its money. The talented team at Red Rover promises to keep his vision alive and continue his legacy.

In honor of Andy, his family and friends request that memorial donations be made to Plan Canada (Foster Parents Plan) at www.plancanada.ca. ■



Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas



Plumber



Get Ed



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Graceful Pandamonium

DreamWorks gets a head start on the summer animated feature derby with the finely crafted *Kung Fu Panda*, which is already being touted as one of the best-looking CG toons ever made. *by Michael Mallory*



The title pretty much says it all. No animal is less suited to be a kung fu master than a giant panda. And for the makers of DreamWorks Animation's new comedy/action feature *Kung Fu Panda*, which is being released June 6 through Paramount, that's the whole thematic point: It's *Yin* and *Yang*, a study in contrasts.

"We asked ourselves, 'What if Akira Kurosawa shot a Jerry Lewis movie?'" says co-director John Stevenson, who was a storyboard artist on several DreamWorks features such as *Madagascar* and *Shrek 2*. "There is a certain expectation about how you shoot animated comedy movies, but we wanted to do something different and have a sweeping, epic backdrop and great emotions, then have this chaotic element in the middle."

Co-director Mark Osborne (director of the 1998 Oscar-nominated short, *More*), meanwhile, cuts to the chase: "We all wanted to see really adorable stuffed animals beat the crap out of each other."

Taking most of the hits is Po the panda, inhabited by comic actor Jack Black, an endearing klutz who works in his father's noodle shop while dreaming of being a kung fu master, and who through fate finds himself proclaimed the revered and powerful "Dragon Warrior." Under the tutelage of the horrified Master Shifu (Dustin Hoffman), Po has to stand up against the vicious, dark-hearted Tai Lung (Ian McShane of *Deadwood* fame), Shifu's former son figure.

Given that set-up, the potential for comedy is obvious. What are unexpected are the scenes of intense drama and fist-flying action that offset the slapstick. "All the characters take things very seriously," says Jen Yuh Nelson, who was the film's head of story. "They never 'gag' for the camera."

For the action sequences, the production called upon Rodolphe Guenoden, a supervising animator who is also a practitioner of martial arts. Guenoden choreographed the fighting moves for every character, which was no easy task considering one, Master Tigress (voiced by Angelina Jolie), has four legs; another, Master Mantis (Seth Rogen), has six; Master Crane (David Cross) has wings; and yet another, Master Viper (Lucy Liu), has no

appendages at all. The remaining "Furious Five" warrior, Master Monkey, is voiced by Jackie Chan, who refrained from contributing any action choreography.

Working with head of animation Dan Wagner (whom Osborne calls the emotional "Yin to Rodolphe's Yang"), Guenoden had the animators closely study kung fu cinema and even arranged for

was easier and quicker for me to do it in 2D and then show the animators the test with the timing and posing, so they could recreate the scenes in 3D," he says. "Sometimes an animator would tell me at the end of the day that he was to start on a new [action] scene the next day, so I would have to animate a scene at night and shoot it early in the morning, and



"We asked ourselves, 'What if Akira Kurosawa shot a Jerry Lewis movie? There is a certain expectation about how you shoot animated comedy movies, but we wanted to do something different and have a sweeping, epic backdrop and great emotions, then have this chaotic element in the middle.'"

—Co-director John Stevenson

them to take lessons in the martial arts. But what works for humans, even in the animalistic styles of Kung Fu, would not work for the characters. Says Guenoden: "In the original kung fu 'crane' style there are actually beak strikes that are mimicked with the hands, but we didn't want to do that. It's a weapon, basically, and since Master Crane is one of the heroes, we didn't want him to strike with his beak." Similar consideration was given to Master Viper, who never bites an opponent.

As a 2D animator working for the first time in CG, Guenoden found it much simpler to rough out his choreography traditionally and shoot a quick animatic. "It

then pass it on at 9 a.m."

In the picture's ultimate demonstration of contrast, *Kung Fu Panda* actually features a stylized 2D sequence directed by Nelson and animated by James Baxter, an alum of DreamWorks' hand-drawn days whose indie studio also provided the traditional toon elements for last year's *Enchanted*. "We wanted to create a style that hooked into the CG world fairly well, but which also looked current and paid homage to the anime notion of being economical with drawings," Baxter says. "We came up with a hybrid version where we would not animate that much, but go in and use digital manipulation to create



Sacred Sites: Production designer Raymond Zibach and cinematographer Yong Duk Jhun researched actual Chinese architecture and used many of the region's historic buildings as inspiration.



extra bits of movement."

The most immediately remarkable thing about *Kung Fu Panda*, however, is its look. The first CG movie shot in anamorphic widescreen, it is arguably the best-looking animated film ever made, with landscapes that recall the visions of artists Li Huayi and the Asian-influenced Eyvind Earle. The directors and the visual team, including production designer Raymond Zibach, art director Tang Kheng Heng, and cinematographer Yong Duk Jhun, also embraced the Asian philosophy of "beauty and emptiness." "We weren't trying to fill up the frame," says Osborne, "we were trying to create interesting compositions that were balanced within the frame and allowed for emptiness."

Despite being set in China's talking-animal-with-clothing era, actual Chinese architecture and iconography were carefully studied and recreated. "Researching architecture and finding out the significance of a lot of this architecture was huge," says Zibach. "A lot of buildings that we loved were religious so we really had to watch how we used them. At the same time, that stuff is so beautiful you want to depict aspects of it." He goes on to say that the color palette for the film was pushed to the point where it resembled that of traditional animation.

Production on *Kung Fu Panda* was sidelined twice by DreamWorks, first in the wake of the success of *Madagascar*, and later to focus on *Shrek the Third*. But that gave the story department more valuable time, particularly for the climactic confrontation between Tai Lung and Shifu. "We always wanted to give Tai Lung a backstory about how his relationship with Shifu affected him," says Nelson, "but how do you show it subtly and make the characters more real? That's the kind of thing we had the time for."

That scene is the rawest emotional Yin of the movie ... at least until Po Yangs himself into the middle of it. "It's that moment when you get the balance back and everybody breathes a sigh of relief," Nelson says. ■

DreamWorks Animation's *Kung Fu Panda* kicks into U.S. theaters on June 6.



John Stevenson



Mark Osborne



Jen Yuh Nelson

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WALL•E: THE FINAL FRONTIER

Why the animators at Pixar were dying to work on the studio's ninth animated feature which centers on a silent metallic hero on an Earth deserted by humans.
by Charles Solomon

A squat robot rolls through the deserted streets of a vast, ruined city, scooping up trash and crushing it into neat cubes. With a patient determination Sisyphus might envy, the robot stacks the blocks into towers that rival the crumbling skyscrapers.

WALL•E, the new Pixar feature, directed by studio veteran Andrew Stanton (*Finding Nemo*, *A Bug's Life*) takes place in a setting that's utterly removed from the suburban comfort of Andy's room. Humanity has left Earth centuries ago, and they left it a mess. WALL•E (an acronym for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-class) has been

doing his best to clean it up ever since—and he'll continue doing his job as long as the sun shines on his solar panels.

At a time when many animated features stress non-stop verbal gags over animated acting, WALL•E represents a break from the norm: the film is done almost entirely in pantomime. The forlorn title character doesn't even speak, beyond uttering a few robotic noises. His metal body can't be squashed and stretched, and he can't make the facial expressions animators usually rely on for a mime character, making the challenge of animating him that much more difficult.

"If there's one thing an animator instinctively enjoys doing, it's pantomime—it's inherent in the medium," says writer-director Stanton. "There's an assumption I had to convince a lot of people to make a movie like this, but I didn't have to do any convincing: I had to fend people off. The animators were dying to try a character like this one."

Silence Is Golden

"I don't think that pantomime's more difficult to animate, but I think the animators were surprised to discover how hard it was to convey thought processes and emotions with such a limited



Space Oddity: Although Fred Willard, Sigourney Weaver, Jeff Garlin, John Ratzenberger and Kathy Najimy lend their voices to WALL•E, the film relies more on pantomime and innovative sound design by Oscar-winner Ben Burtt.



Andrew Stanton



machine," he continues. "It was a struggle for some animators to come up with a grammar that worked for them; others, I just got out of their way."

Stanton feels the key to bringing WALL•E to life as a character is his construction, which determines the movements he's capable of making. "We probably spent a year and a half going over how he was constructed and how he would move, so we could give the audience all the results squash and stretch give without really squashing and stretching the character," Stanton says. "He's a machine that can collapse into a box like a turtle, with tele-

scopic limbs and neck, and treads on wheels that can reconfigure."

"At Pixar, the one style we adhere to

ments in his design. When we started animating, we wanted to figure out how he would fold in on himself and

"We probably spent a year and a half going over how he was constructed and how he would move, so we could give the audience all the results squash and stretch give without really squashing and stretching the character."

—Andrew Stanton, WALL•E's writer-director

in all of our films is the truth of the materials, and never more so than with WALL•E," agrees directing animator Angus MacLane. "We were creating a character who was a totally new robot, but there are still some familiar ele-

unfold, and how he would gather and compress the trash. We used those movements as a base line."

The artists studied the ground-breaking Pixar short *Luxo, Jr.* to learn how WALL•E's construction should dictate



An Object with Character: Writer/director Andrew Stanton says he stressed the importance of making sure audiences see WALL•E as a machine first, and a character second. "If we do our jobs right, he doesn't have to do anything; he can just sit there and people will think he's a character."

his movements. "It's obvious when you look at it that John [Lasseter] slightly rejiggered an appliance that has a built-in squash and stretch to it and a design that makes you want to project a personality onto it," Stanton explains. "With WALL•E, I was like a broken record with the designers, the story artists and the animators: you have to see him as a machine first and a character second. If we do our jobs right, he doesn't have to do anything, he can just sit there and people will think he's a character."

Hand to No Mouth

Of course, WALL•E does a lot more than sit. As he gathers trash into his compacting hopper, an occasional object strikes his fancy: He thoughtfully examines some remnant of human

civilization, trying to fathom its purpose. Although his hands are large, jointed metal devices, they move with surprising delicacy as they caress the box from a diamond ring, a toaster, a VHS cassette. The movements suggest the hands of a dancer or a sign-language expert.

"A lot of what WALL•E does involves his hands. He doesn't have a mouth, and there's not a lot of head and shoulder acting we could do, aside from moving his head up and down," says MacLane. "So the hands are very important in this film. His hands are these huge trowel-things that could be perceived as dangerous, so it was important to soften them up and make

them feel like they were sensitive organs that mirrored his emotions."

Stanton and MacLane stress that the animation was created in the service of the story. The artists had to find a vocabulary of poses and movements that would telegraph the silent WALL•E's thoughts and feelings to the audience. MacLane concludes: "I think the animation gets a lot of credit in this film that belongs to the story crew. Because of the way the story is told, the audience projects things onto the animation; the animation just needs to get out of the way of what the story wants to say. What we put into the animation is important, but so is what we *didn't* put in. We tried to simplify the animation so that an action can only mean the one thing we want it to." ■

Charles Solomon is an award-winning animation historian and teacher. He is the author of *Enchanted Drawings: The History of Animation*.

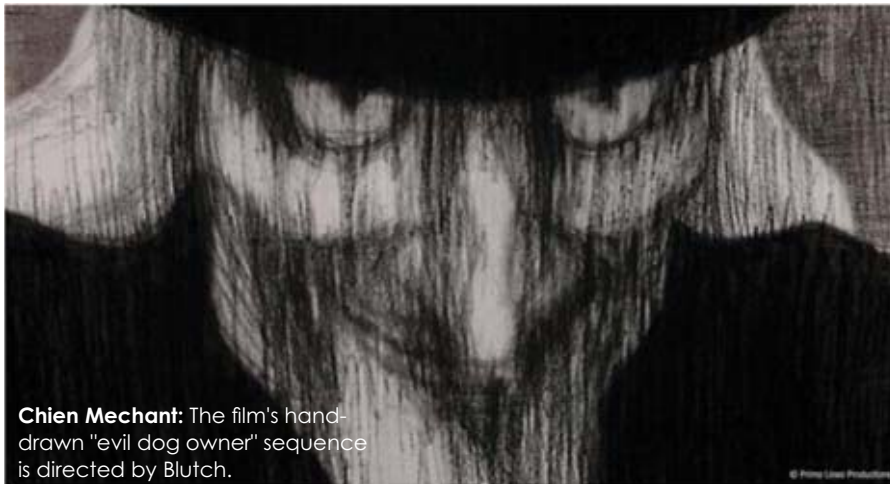
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Chien Mechant: The film's hand-drawn "evil dog owner" sequence is directed by Blutch.

A Stunning Scare

Six very grown-up tales by international comic-book artists come to animated life in the new French anthology, *Fear(s) of the Dark*. by Christopher Panzner

Here is some good news for fans of sophisticated animation who have been praying for an end to the never-ending parade of loud and predictable CG-animated animals on the big screen. The French have come to the rescue again!

Conceived by executive producers Valérie Schermann and Christophe Jankovic in collaboration with artistic director Etienne Robial (who also delivered the film's wonderful Saul Bass-inspired credits) *Fear(s) of the Dark* is a milestone in the nascent "graphic-novel-as-film" phenomenon out of Europe. It features six short tales by French artists "Blutch" (a.k.a. Christian Hincker), Marie Caillou and Pierre di Sciullo, Italian Lorenzo Matteotti and Americans Charles Burns and Richard McGuire. Produced entirely in 2D black and white—with the exception of one sequence done in monotone blue and white, with eerie splashes of blood red—the film explores the darker side of the human psyche with a visual poetry that is so new, so welcome, it's ... scary.

A Shot in the Dark

Fear(s) of the Dark—*Peur(s) du Noir* as it is called in French—was developed over a period of two years. "There are six stories with six different

graphic treatments and six different technical approaches, which is why the development took so long," explains Schermann, who also produced Serge Elissalde and Grégoire Solotareff's acclaimed animated feature *U* two years ago. Classic fears such as ferocious animals, nightmares, cemeteries, crows, mutilated corpses, mad doctors, insects, death and the dark are addressed in various styles. There are also discussions of psycho-social fears like political correctness, of becoming bourgeois, of one's self and even of what it means to be human. With nudity, raw violence and sexual

fantasy content, the film is definitely intended for an adult audience.

Stylistically, the movie is also very mature. The sequences vary in technique and treatment: Goya-esque, semi-transparent "charcoals" by Blutch; faux woodcuts by Burns; Flash Euromanga by Caillou (written by Romain Slocombe); neo-surrealism from the unmistakable Matteotti (written by Jerry Kramsky); Hans Richter-like abstracts from di Sciullo; and the "scissor" cut-outs of McGuire (written by Michel Pirus). The Blutch and di Sciullo sequences appear interstitially; threads in an abstract narrative punctuated with original music (René Aubry, Boris Gronemberger, Laurent Perez Del Mar and George Van Dam) and stunning sound design by Alea Jacta Post-Production in Brussels.

When asked about the creative challenges of working with established graphic novel artists, Schermann responds, "[The most demanding aspects] were adapting the stories to another medium and transposing these graphic universes as faithfully as possible to animation. We were making a film, not a collection of shorts." Some of the artists, like Blutch and Charles Burns, had never done animation before, either. "We had to find animation artists who were capable of handling such a complicated and demanding task," she adds. Not to mention the technical challenges and the logistics of international production.

Fear Factory

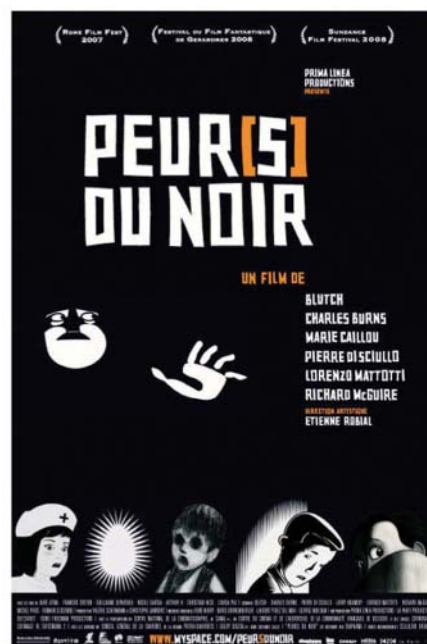
Ten and a half months in the making, with 130 production people spread out over five studios in three countries, the project posed plenty of other challenges. "The [traditional 2D] Blutch sequence was the hardest, believe it or not," says Schermann. Adds Jankovic, "Other parts of the film we thought were going



Christophe Jankovic



Valérie Schermann



to be relatively easy also turned out to be much harder than we imagined. For McGuire's story, for example, we had to come up with a solution that was part traditional, part digital [Flash/3D] animation."

Blutch's and di Sciullo's (Flash) sequences were done at Prima Linea (Angoulême);

McGuire's, Prima Linea and 2 Minutes (Angoulême/Paris); Matteotti's (traditional 2D), Prima Linea and Belanin (Shanghai); Caillou's (Illustrator/Flash), Prima Linea and Speculoos (Brussels); and Burns' (3D), Def2shoot (Paris).

But while reaction to the film by the animation industry has been quite enthusiastic—it has been selected for a



Creepy Love: The movie's ominous "insect/woman" section is directed by comic artist Charles Burns (*Black Hole*).

number of international festivals—and comic-book fans have been "curious and appreciative," the box office has been "mediocre" according to the producers. Schermann and Jankovic—who, incidentally, won the Best European Producer prize at Cartoon Movie this year—also collaborated on *U* and another anthology of five shorts called *Loulou* et

Autres Loups (*Loulou and the Other Wolves*), which also featured Caillou and McGuire. And while films as experimental as *Fear(s) of the Dark* are a thrill for artists, Schermann admits that they're difficult to finance. When asked about the film's budget, her candid response is, "It's too tight to be a good example."

Whatever fears we may all harbor, one to add to the list is the

fear of not getting enough of this type of work produced ... or seen. Fortunately, the movie is scheduled for a U.S. release at year's end by International Film Circuit! Leave all your fears aside and go! ■

Chris Panzner is a Paris-based writer, artist and producer currently developing several animated feature films.

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How to Make a Perfect French Western

Producer Marc du Pontavice chats about *Go West: A Lucky Luke Adventure*, Xilam's delightful throwback to old comedy classics. **by Ramin Zahed**

Although general American audiences are not familiar with Lucky Luke, international fans have been enjoying the adventures of this lean, sharp-shooting cowboy since he was first introduced in a comic-book adventure almost 60 years ago. Created by Belgian artist Morris, the clever character can draw a gun faster than his own shadow and always gets the last laugh when dealing with the shady characters of the old American West.

Through the years, several live-action and animated features tried to bring Morris' (and René Goscinny's in later years) creation to life. French studio Xilam, which delivered a 52-episode *Lucky Luke* TV series seven years ago, recently released a new feature-length movie titled *Go West: A Lucky Luke Adventure* (*Tous à l'Ouest: Une Aventure de Lucky Luke*) and, by all accounts, it's one of the most faithful and funniest versions of the Franco-Belgian classic. Directed by TV series veteran Olivier Jean Marie, the 90-minute movie is a delightful homage to classic Tex Avery toons and spoofs many of the Western movie clichés we've come to love through the years. We were fortunate enough to catch the film's busy pro-

ducer Marc du Pontavice (*Shuriken School*, *Kaena: The Prophecy*, *Highlander: The Animated Series*) between festivals and screenings and ask him a few questions about this new adventure:

Animag: The film only took three years to bring to the screen, which is remarkable for animation. What was your original plan for the project?

MdP: We wanted to bring some irreverence and slapstick humor to the traditional "Wild, Wild West" storytelling. We felt the past attempts in adapting *Lucky Luke* comics never quite explored the extraordinary potential of the characters. Although these characters were created for comic-book pages, we felt that the Tex Avery touch (if we may) would lift those characters to a level of comedy they had never reached before.

Animag: Why do you think so many strong European projects fail to get wider releases in the U.S.? Do you think it's getting easier for independent toons overseas?

MdP: Alas, it's very simple. Animation is perceived as a business born for family

entertainment. Therefore it takes \$30 to \$50 million to market such films in addition to the negative cost. At this price studios prefer to finance and control their own project development. Which is a shame as studios tend to mimic again and again the same narrative pattern, narrowing the storytelling in the same routine film after film. Oddly enough, I think nowadays there is more creativity in television than in the movie business.



Marc du Pontavice

Animag: What are some of the aspects of your movie that you think worked really well?

MdP: I'm very proud of the animation. It's everything I love about hand-drawn animation, and it's far away from Disney standards. Most of the comedy is closer to the silent movie legends such as Buster Keaton than to any animated film. I also love Hervé Lavandier's score for the movie, a great mix of jazz and Eastern European fanfare (think Emir Kusturica). It's a character on its own and part of the madness that drives the movie's energy.

Animag: What kind of technologies (2D/CG) did you use in the movie?

MdP: The mix of 2D and CGI animation was very challenging. The character animation was 2D with Toon Boom, but the camera, the effects, the vehicles are all CGI-animated. If you look at the film's two big chase scenes (the one in New York, and the other in the mine) you can't figure what's 2D and what's CGI.

Animag: Give us your take on the animation business today?

MdP: Five years ago we thought we were getting into a market where diversity would rule. Alas I must say I'm disappointed, as the business, after shaking the old Disney monopoly, quickly rebuilt a pattern that is so technical and expensive that there is no place for independent films. In Europe there is a growing place for some great animation auteurs such as Mi-

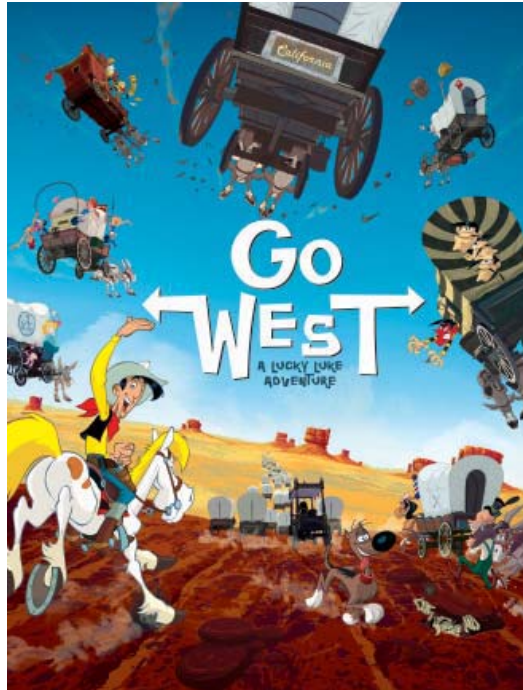
chel Ocelot, Sylvain Chomet or Marjane Satrapi, which is nice. But again we're falling into the trap of creative versus commercial, David against Goliath. And it's not going to help films to travel all over the world.

Animag: The European animation feature scene seems to be in a renaissance of sorts. Why do you think this is happening now?

MdP: Because in Europe, there are more adults who care for the stories told by European directors, and because animation seems to escape the trap of being pigeonholed in the family section, because Europe is trying to establish its own aesthetic of animation, away from the grand American or Japanese references. And our audiences have begun to recognize and long for these projects.

Animag: Who are your animation heroes? How did Tex Avery inspire your movie?

MdP: Whether in theaters or on TV, clas-



sic animation by the likes of Tex Avery and Chuck Jones always made me laugh in a way that no other movie could. I mean they taught me a sense of nonsense, and above all, I under-

stood that animation could be a rebellion—an act of anarchy!

Animag: Why do you think Lucky Luke hasn't been more popular in the U.S.?

MdP: If you think about it, beyond *The Smurfs*, no other European franchise ever crossed the Atlantic. Some have cult followings, but they're never hugely popular. I guess it's like in Japan, the rules of storytelling go so deep in the American culture that it's hard for foreigners to break through. It's even more absurd when you think that Lucky Luke is about the "Wild West" traditions. But, hey, who do we think we are to talk about cowboys? Do you think Americans can tell you about French cuisine? Oops, wait, yes, they do, and they do it well ... I love Brad Bird. He is my hero these days! ■

Go West: A Lucky Luke Adventure was released in France and Belgium last December. You can watch the film's trailer at www.luckyluke-lefilm.com.

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A Simian Space Odyssey

Space Chimps, Vanguard Animation's high-flying summer pic, promises memorable characters and lots of CG-animated inter-galactic fun. [by Ramin Zahed](#)

Who knew *The Right Stuff*, the 1983 movie about astronaut Chuck Yeager (as played by Sam Shepard) and the heroic crew of Mercury 7, would one day inspire a CG-animated feature about a team of apes in space? As *Space Chimps* writer and director Kirk DeMicco tells the story, "I originally pitched the idea to [producer] John Williams after watching *The Right Stuff* for the first time in a long time and hearing Chuck Yeager's line 'Monkeys? You think a monkey knows he's sittin' on top of a rocket that might explode?' Well, I thought, what if he did!?"

DeMicco presented his idea right before Williams' blockbuster *Shrek* opened in the summer of 2001 and went on to make over \$484 million at the international box office and win the first Oscar for best Animated Feature. "We decided to develop it the moment we heard it," says Williams, who is also the CEO of Vanguard Animation, the studio behind 2005's *Valiant* and last year's *Happily N'Ever After*. "It had big fun, big adventure and big movie in all of its core elements."

At the center of this adventure is a mischievous circus chimp named Ham

(*Saturday Night Live* player Adam Samburg in a tailor-made role) whose grandfather was the first primate ever sent into space. As the result of a publicity stunt, our hero and a female chimp named Luna (voiced by Cheryl Hines) find themselves on a space mission to explore a mysterious new planet. Of course, all isn't as it seems on this beautiful new world and the chimps have to fight an evil tyrant and restore peace before returning to their home on Earth.



John Williams



Curtis Augspurger

Williams says he and his team spent three years developing the script and core conceptual characters and environments artwork, two years pulling together the financing and two years of actual production—from January 2006 to February 2008. "Overall, I don't think the studio system works well unless you have an inspired creative person checking all the decisions," he says frankly. "I feel like we evolved into a great (and very small) creative/production team with *Space Chimps*. It was great circling back to Kirk DeMicco as a director of the movie."

This is a first time directing effort for DeMicco, who also has writer credit on Warner Bros.' 1998 feature *Quest for Camelot*, 2005's talking-animal movie *Racing Stripes* and DreamWorks'

Primate Date: Andy Samburg, Cheryl Hines, Jeff Daniels, Kenan Thompson, Stanley Tucci, Kristin Chenoweth and Patrick Warburton round up the voice cast of *Space Chimps*. Musician Dave Stewart and the Blue Man Group provide the film's music.





FEATURES

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upcoming caveman feature *Crood Awakening*. When asked about the challenges of taking his brainchild from script to the difficult seven-year process of development and production, he jokes, "As everyone knows making animated movies is completely devoid of challenges! I'm surprised that not everybody does it!"

He offers a more serious response when we ask him about the part of the project with which he's most pleased. "Thankfully, what I like best is the character of Ham," says DeMicco. "Andy Samberg brought not only his inimitable sense of humor but also a great performance. He balanced the right amount of comedy with the emotion."

Williams agrees. "We made a movie with a truly irreverent character that is both relatable and ultimately likable even though he starts out as a self-centered and not very likable wild card," he says. "I also like the fact that we were able to give a big scope to the story, which makes the movie feel like a classic big studio movie adventure."

Another important factor in the success of the feature was the involvement of exec producer Barry Sonnenfeld, whose long resume includes directing hits such as *The Addams Family* and *Men In Black* and producing a wide range of TV shows and movies—from Disney's *Enchanted* to ABC's *Pushing Daisies*. Williams says it was Sonnenfeld who kept the feature on the right track and has been a creative consultant since it began production. "Barry was a critical and huge contributor to all aspects of the movie."

Of course, in a summer season that is bringing moviegoers no less than three other CG-animated pictures such as DreamWorks' *Kung Fu Panda*, Pixar's *WALL•E* and nWave's *Fly Me to the Moon*, the producers had to make sure the chimps, their spaceship and the mysterious planet they land on all look awesome on the big screen. Producer Curtis Augspurger (*Valiant*, *Monkeybone*), associate producer Tom Jacob and their team had to set up a facility in Vancouver from scratch in a short period of time to accommodate the demands of the production.

"We treated the build very much like a live-action shoot, where every decision is made to the benefit of the film and not about building the studio," says Augspurger. "That way, when IT is asking for the most expensive piece of equipment known to man (as they often do), you are able to discern if an alternative can be made to work for a short-term run."

Hiring the right people who work together is the trickiest aspect of the process, says Augspurger. He notes, "Talented, hard-working people are the mainstay of any production team and finding a solid local core is what we focused on first. Fourteen countries and multiple languages later, we had our team of 170—which we could contract and expand throughout the needs of the production cycle."

The CG team put down new plans for *Space Chimps* that improved upon their experience from *Valiant*, and then built an asset management system and an integrated pipeline around it. Aug-

spurger says the team lit, rendered and comped 1,700-plus shots in about four months!

"We wrote more tools on this show than last, and we built a slightly larger team around that need," he further explains. "We wrote a real-time rendering solution that emulates Pixar's RenderMan, asset management tools and an integrated database tool suite that did most of our production reporting. Final Cut, Maya, MTOR, Pixar's RenderMan and Shake were the fundamental tools that were used throughout the process."

Overall, Augspurger says he's quite proud of the accomplishments of his young and driven animation team. "They've accomplished collectively something far greater than any of them initially imagined themselves capable of doing," he says. "We've completed a really funny film that looks like we had three times the budget and twice the time. Everyone gave selflessly."

So now that Vanguard Animation's clever space apes are poised to rocket to stardom this summer, what kind of advice does Williams offer other indie animation companies? "Hold on to your hats!" he says. "You're in for a wild ride that may not have a clearly defined or ideal decision-making process. And, keep your head down and do the best work you can—and hope that someone who controls the decision process is listening!" ■

Twentieth Century Fox will release *Space Chimps* in U.S. theaters on July 18.

JUN/JULY 08

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Bill Plympton's *Idiots and Angels*

The Long and Short of It All

This year's Annecy lineup offers a brilliant cross section of animated visions from creative auteurs all around the world. We catch up with Bill Plympton, Elizabeth Hobbs, Matthew Walker and Nina Paley who are all competing at the world-class event. **by Chris Grove**

After you've spent only a few minutes talking to Bill Plympton it's hard not to think: The guy has it made. How many people—artists to be exact—get to do what they do for 30 years without ever having to really work for anyone but himself or herself? Since the success of his Academy Award-nominated short toon *Your Face* in 1988, Plympton has been making a pretty good living as a freelancer. Either creating memorable ads for his bread-and-butter corporate clients or, more to the point, creating award-winning shorts and feature-length animated films.

At this year's iteration of the Annecy International Animated Film Festival the prolific Plympton has one of each on display. As with his past work, the 25,000 frames that comprise *Idiots and Angels* have all been hand drawn by Plympton. *Idiots* is a dark comedy about a morally bankrupt man struggling to hide the good side of himself, which manifests itself in a pair of angel wings that just won't go away. "One of the things that makes Annecy my favorite festival is that it's a festival *and* a market," says Plympton. A one-man band who writes, animates and personally markets his films,

Plympton is one of those renaissance types one often finds in the outer reaches of the animation world.

His other film in this year's fest is the third chapter in his so-called *Bad Dog* trilogy. *Hot Dog* (2008) is the follow-up film to the Oscar-nominated *Guard Dog* and its award-winning sequel *Guide Dog*. When he first screened *Guard Dog* at the Maryland Film Festival a few years ago, the audience went crazy. "I've never had a character so loved by the audience," says Plympton. "I

"One of the things that makes Annecy my favorite festival is that it's a festival *and* a market."

— Animator Bill Plympton, who has placed both a new feature (*Idiots and Angels*) and new short (*Hot Dog*) in competition at Annecy 2008.

decided to make him my Mickey Mouse." Plympton says the French in particular are a great audience for animated features because they don't, in general, hold the stereotype that cartoons are just for kids. And it's the country that promulgated the auteur theory, and Plympton and many of his fellow Annecy colleagues are auteurs by necessity.

Among other notable artists invited to screen their work at Annecy 2008:

Elizabeth Hobbs and her short toon *The Old, Old, Very Old Man* (6:38). The plot is Heisenberg's uncertainty principle writ large. In the film, the 152-year-old Thomas Parr is taken to meet King Charles I, who orders an immediate celebration of his longevity—with fatal and unintended consequences. To date *Old Man* has been in a raft of festivals (Edinburgh Film Festival, Ottawa International Animation Festival, Dok Leipzig, etc.) and won a slate of awards (Best Animation, Flip Festival; Best Independent Film, BAFI; Best Short Film, Aurora, etc.) before its Annecy debut. "Every opportunity to show a new film is extremely encouraging," says Hobbs. "Annecy has an incredible reputation so I'm really delighted to have been included in the selection."

Proving that art is the first consideration of the true indie animator, *Old Man* was animated by Hobbs painting blue ink on one small white bathroom tile. "I drew the images in a very spare way a little bit like



Bill Plympton



Elizabeth Hobbs



Matthew Walker



Nina Paley

Delft tiles," Hobbs says. "I captured a frame, then erased the animated part and painted it in its next position, captured the next frame and so on. When I finished the shot I cleaned the tile and drew the next one. All I have left is a slightly scratched white tile."

Matthew Walker with his two short films: *John and Karen* (3:00) and *Operator* (1:30). Walker's graduate student film

continued on page 24



IN
LOVING MEMORY
OF

ANDY KNIGHT

1961 - 2008

AND HIS LEGACY LIVES ON

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MULTI-AWARD WINNING DIRECTOR OF ANIMATION

SOME WORDS FROM HIS STAFF.....

Andy's energetic artistry mixed with quiet confidence will continue to be my personal inspiration forever, and I am blessed and thankful for having the time with him that I did. - Steve Wittmann [animator]

I admired and respected him for the passion he had for his work and the love for his family. He was a great person, always with a smile on his face, always willing to provide anyone with the opportunity to explore his or her full potential. His heart was big and his caring and understanding toward others was enviable. He will be greatly missed.

- Bruno Tacchino [animator]



Andy was a challenge to produce for - he didn't follow schedules, he'd insist on a smoke break right before a conference call, he was a constant whirlwind of ideas and solutions; and I adored working with him because he was just so damn talented and because he trusted and pushed us to run with his vision and create amazing work. - Irene Sousa [producer]

I always knew the influence Andy had on my life. However, it has been over the past couple weeks that I learned just how deeply influential Andy was to a world-wide community who reached out with so much support to both his family and friends here at Red Rover, thank you! It is truly moving to see the impact one man can have on so many. I miss his contagious laughs filling the Studio. -Lara Osland [sales & marketing]

The tragic news of Andy's passing rocked us all. We are honoured to have had the privilege of working alongside such a talented and loveable man. The staff at Red Rover are dedicated to keeping his dream alive by building upon all that he taught us.

Annecy

continued from page 22

Astronauts quickly established him as a talent to be reckoned with in 2005 as he readied himself to matriculate from the Newport School of Art, Media and Design at the University of Wales.

"Annecy was the first animation festival I went to when I was at university, and it really opened my eyes to what was out there, good and bad," Walker says. "I was making *Astronauts* at the time and seeing the graduation work at Annecy really made me feel like I had no chance of even being accepted into the festival. So it was a huge surprise when my film was not only accepted the following year but won the graduation prize."

Much in the vein of *Astronauts*' subtly deft and dark humor, *Operator* is about a man with nothing to do who manages to get God's phone number. In order for a short film to work, especially a comedy, it must have a twist that's both unexpected and organic. Safe to say that when the audience sees *Operator* they'll see that Walker's no flash in the pan and far from a one-joke wonder. For its part, *John and Karen* is the story about John the polar bear who feels terrible about the argument he had with Karen the penguin the previous evening and really hopes she will take him back.

The character animation in both films is very similar, says Walker. "They were both hand drawn in Flash in much the same way as I would have done with paper and a light box, just with the added benefit of 'cut' and 'paste' and 'undo.' Both also mainly involved the animating of [characters] sitting down and talking in one location. I like doing this because I can concentrate on getting the character across without animating a lot of action. I always animate the eyes last as this is the bit that brings a character to life."

Nina Paley and the feature-length *Sita Sings the Blues* (82 minutes). A fixture of the New York indie animation scene, Paley is a longtime veteran of syndicated comic strips, creating *Fluff* (Universal Press Syndicate), *The Hots* (King Features) and her own alternative weekly *Nina's Adventures*. In 1998 she

began making animated films, including the popular environmental short *The Stork*.

In 2002 Nina followed her then-husband to Trivandrum, India, where she read her first Ramayana. This inspired her to write *Sita Sings the Blues*, a film she animated and produced single-handedly over the course of five years on a home computer. Producing and animating the film took a bundle of off-the-shelf technology—Flash, Final Cut Pro, Synthetik Studio Artist, After Effects, Cintiq—and hand-painted watercolors, cut-outs and, as Paley puts it, straight-ahead, collage and rotoscoping. "Being selected for the Annecy festival adds prestige to any film," says Paley. Besides, she adds: "I'm looking forward to swimming in the lake

Matthew Walker's *John and Karen*

and eating delicious French cheese again."

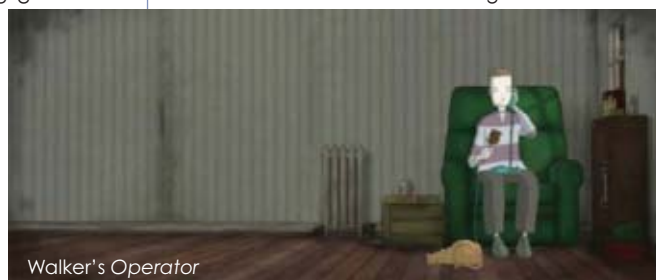
All kidding aside, *Sita* has been a labor of love for Paley and she hopes Annecy will prove to be a solid launching ground for the film. "It's my first feature. I'm still learning about the biz," Paley says. *Sita* has been to a lot of general film festivals, not just animation festivals. The world premiere was at Berlinale (where it won a Special Mention). Its North American premiere was at the Tribeca Film Festival at the end of April 2008. "Most filmgoers overlook animation," Paley says, "especially independent animation for adults, so I'm eager to see how an animation-friendly audience receives it."

Nina Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*Elizabeth Hobbs' *The Old, Old, Very Old Man*

As a measure of how competitive it was just to get into Annecy, this year 1,866 projects were submitted to festival organizers (40 features, 718 short films, 159 TV series, 25 TV specials, 36 educational/scientific projects, 139 animated ads, 94 music videos and 656 student graduation efforts).

Nine animated features are part of the official selections in 2008: Shinji Aramaki's *Appleseed: Ex Machina*, Guillaume Ivanel and Arthur Qwak's *Dragon Hunters*, Hayo Freitag's *The Three Robbers*, Plympton's *Idiots and Angels*, Adrià García and Victor Maldonado's *Nocturna*, Etienne Robial's *Fear(s) of the Dark*, Masayuki Kojima's *Piano no Mori*, Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues* and Olivier Jean-Marie's *Go West: A Lucky Luke Adventure*.

The Short Film category is screening 42 projects by animators from around the world—among them, Sally Ann Arthur's *A-Z*, Christelle Soutif's *Arrosez Les Bien!*, Dennis Tropicoff's *Chainsaw*, Brent Dawe's *Because You're Gorgeous*, Arthur Metcalf's *Fantaisie in Bubblewrap*, Jo Lawrence's *Glow*, Plympton's *Hot Dog*, Kunio Kato's *La Maison En Petits Cubes*, Bryan Larson's *My Little Angel*, Walker's *Operator*, Mike Roush's *The Hidden Life of the Burrowing Owl* and

Walker's *Operator*

Hobbs' *The Old, Old, Very Old Man*.

Among the more widely recognized titles running in the TV series category are Nickelodeon's *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, MTV's *Celebrity Deathmatch*, Alphanim's *Hairy Scary*, Zinkia/Granada's *Pocoyo*, LOGO's *Rick & Steve: The Happiest Gay Couple in All the World*, Nickelodeon's *Tak and the Power of Juju* and Studio Film Bilder's *The Bunjies*. ■

For more info about this year's jam-packed festival, visit www.annecy.org

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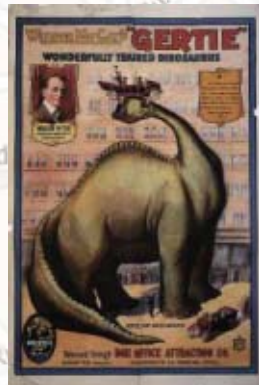
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10 Eclectic Things to Do at Annecy This Year!

Learn more about the life and times of Gertie the Dinosaur's creator Winsor McCay in a special program presented by Oscar-winning animator and film historian John Canemaker.



How does France's Supinfocom school keep giving the world such well-rounded animators? You can take in some of their greatest hits from the past two decades in one special presentation.

Had enough of safe, goody-goody movies and TV shows? Then dive in to the wild, wild world of "Politically Incorrect" cartoons as the festival programmers are promising a "Spicy Animation" sidebar.

Richard Williams' classic 1988 feature *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* has inspired many of today's top animators. You can catch the movie on the big screen at



Annecy and enjoy a special exhibit devoted to the art of this brilliant movie.

Yes, we know, you are there for the animation. But don't forget that you're in beautiful Annecy, after all!



Visit a castle or two (de Montrottier or d'Annecy), pay a visit to the 12th century Palais de l'Isle (also known as the old prison), rent a pedal boat on the lake and enjoy some of the region's delicious cuisine at one of those *intime* restaurants and cafés. Oh, and make sure you pack some of those hangover pills!

—Ramin Zahed

Revisit the amazing creations of French animation

pioneer Émile Cohl (1857-1938), the man known both as the "Father of the Animated Cartoon" and "The Oldest Parisian."



If you don't know who Quirino Cristiani is, you should definitely check out the new documentary by Gabriele Zucchelli. He is the Argentine animator known for making the first animated feature with sound.

What would life be without the amazing creations of Tex Avery? The festival honors the Oscar-winning genius who gave us timeless characters such as Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny and Droopy.



Enjoy recent big-screen hits such as *Persepolis*, *Max & Co.* and *The Simpsons Movie* projected on the famous Annecy open-air big screen.



Anurag Kashyap's *Return of Hanuman*

Check out the festival's special Indian programming sidebar and fall in love with three collection of shorts and two special feature presentations created by the country's talented artists.



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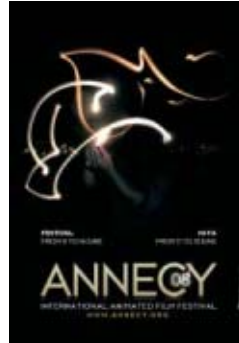
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Ten Minutes with Monsieur le Directeur

We recently caught up with Serge Bromberg, the cool and sophisticated artistic director of the Annecy International Festival of Animation. Here's what he told us about the upcoming event (June 11-13) and some of the trends he sees in the wonderful world of animation:



Animag: A festival director gets to sample a huge cross section of animated projects from creative minds all over the world. Did you come across any trends or dominant themes in this year's selections?

Serge Bromberg: Selections are based upon the quality of the films, not based on their themes. But, of course, directors are more and more inclined to deal with the subjects and concerns of today: political situations, social issues, lifestyles and, of course, the environment. But I must admit that—and this is also the pre-selection committee's opinion—among the films we've viewed, there are still a lot of films that are jokes, experiments, artistic films that seem to ignore the on-goings in the world. We had the strange feeling that, while the world is changing fast, animators remain in their atelier, do not look out of their windows, and seem removed from the topics of the 21st century—very strange!

Which country seems to be producing the most interesting animated shorts/features in 2008?

Bromberg: It's difficult to say what is "interesting" or not. But clearly, and as in the last years, graduation films directed by students are a breath of fresh air and are very inventive. It is also noticeable this year that TV series, which used to be rather standardized, are more daring and innovative than in the past. It's hard to say why. We also see a trend

toward more feature films and stronger productions from Europe competing with the usual top countries. The results are much more amazing, both in terms of visuals and narrative.

One other thing I have to mention is that this year is the 100th anniversary of the first animated film, *Fantasmagorie*, by Émile Cohl. We have special tributes to Cohl and his creations. I'm amazed at how fresh this two-minute film is, one hundred years after its first release.

What do you value more at the festival: projects that are aesthetically amazing and look really good or the ones that have something important to say or tell a good story?

Bromberg: Again, there is everything, good and bad, creative and standard, fun and sad this year. And as in the previous year, I always feel that the best successes in animation are the films that say something to the audience, where the artists think of the viewer and want to tell them something from the beginning of the creative process. Films made by one person simply for self pleasure are generally not well received by audience, because they feel that there is no intention to share anything with anyone.

Do you have any personal favorites?

Bromberg: As artistic director, it is certainly not my role to name favorites. The festival has always been very strict

on the fact that we have pre-selection committees to select the films that will enter competition. Last year, we have added a special ad-hoc committee for feature films, because there are more and more features to watch. Here again, you see, the producers and directors who are leading the way, because it is not the Festival that produces the good films, but the contrary.

What do you think is the most important role of the Annecy Festival today? Why does the show continue to be on top of everyone's list around the world?

Bromberg: Annecy is this very unique place where, in a magic place by a lake, everyone can present their work, their passion of their profession; where everything is possible, for all talents, in all genres. From the bigger studio to the small independent artist, from the major superstar of animation to the young students who come here for the first time, from the artist to the big distributor, everyone has his place in Annecy on the condition that he wishes to know more about the others. Today, Annecy is the place where all the meetings and face-to-face encounters are possible, through the festival, the MIFA market and throughout the year with all the activities of Cité. We do not seek to be "on top," as you say, all we want is to have a big animation fiesta every year by the lake, and it seems that this goal is shared by about 10,000 people every year. ■

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Your Ultimate Animated Movie Dossier

If you've been having trouble keeping up with the numerous animated theatrical features in various stages of development around the world, you're not alone! Every day we get news of more toons being greenlit and others being pushed back to a place known as "To Be Announced" and "Direct-to-DVD" purgatory. That's why we hope this special movie directory proves useful to all of you toon fans and professionals. By the way, we update this list on the *Animation Magazine* website (www.animationmagazine.net) regularly, so keep sending us your news.

—Compiled by Mercedes Milligan

2008

Kung Fu Panda

DreamWorks, June 6

Directors: Mark Osborne, John Stevenson

Cast: Jack Black, Jackie Chan, Dustin Hoffman, Lucy Liu, Ian McShane

Story: Set in ancient China, this CG feature chronicles the journey of a slacker panda, Po, who must learn to be a Kung Fu Master to thwart the malignant snow leopard Tai Lung and save the Valley of Peace. Ultimately, the once indifferent Po turns the world of Kung Fu on its head and emerges with newfound belief in himself.

The Buzz: It's got pandas, it's got kung fu, it's got friggin' beautiful animation ... What more do you want?! See page 16 for our story on how DreamWorks put a one-two punch into *Kung Fu Panda*.

Website: www.kungfupanda.com

WALL•E

Pixar/Disney, June 27

Director: Andrew Stanton

Cast: Fred Willard, Jeff Garlin, Sigourney Weaver

Story: In the distant future, mankind has abandoned Earth and left it a terrible mess. Only robots are left to clean up the planet, but one curious little bot, WALL•E, hops a ride with a sleek automaton from space and tries to find a home on the universal frontier.

The Buzz: When the first posters for WALL•E cropped up online, it was as if millions of voices in cubicles all over the world were cooing "Cuuuuute!" in unison, but the gorgeous animation goes far beyond the surprising cuddliness of our metal hero. To learn how Pixar breathed life into their little machine, flip to page 20.

Website: www.wall-e.com

Gake no ue no Ponyo (Ponyo on a Cliff)

Toho, July 19 (Japan)

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Story: The story of an average five-year-old boy, Sotuke, who befriends a goldfish princess named Ponyo who longs to become human.

The Buzz: Animation fans are always excited to hear there's a new Miyazaki pic on the way. The 2D film is beautifully rendered in watercolors; the second Ghibli film to use this technique after *My Neighbors the Yamadas*. Queen Sylvia of Sweden was given a sneak peek on her 2007 visit to Japan ... unfortunately the rest of us will just have to wait to see how it measures up!

Website: www.ghibli.jp/ponyo

Space Chimps

20th Century Fox, July 18

Director: Kirk De Micco

Cast: Andy Samberg, Jeff Daniels, Stanley Tucci, Patrick Warburton, Cheryl Hines

Story: A comedy adventure about two NASA chimps that are sent to a galaxy far, far away. One chimp has 'The Right Stuff,' and the other, a good-natured goofball, has 'The Wrong Stuff.' The two chimps find themselves on a strange, uncharted planet, where they embark on a fantastical journey to save its inhabitants from a tyrannical leader.

The Buzz: Producer John Williams and his team at Vanguard (*Valiant*, *Happily N'Ever After*) are producing the animation that'll bring life to the hilarious script by De Micco and *Happily N'Ever After* writer Robert Moreland. If you'll blast off to page 28, we'll give you the full scoop.

Website: www.vanguardanimation.com



Ponyo on a Cliff

BLEACH: Memories of Nobody

VIZ Media, June 12

Director: Noriyuki Abe

Cast: Johnny Yong Bosch, Michelle Ruff

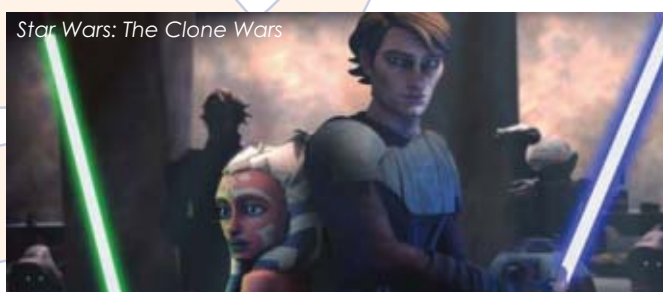
Story: When hordes of unidentified spirits swarm over Karakura Town, only to be wiped out by a mysterious Soul Reaper, Ichigo (Bosch) and Rukia (Ruff) are drawn into an adventure to unravel the origin of these souls without memories.

The Buzz: Based on the epicly popular BLEACH anime and manga series, *Memories of Nobody* was released in Japan in 2006, debuting at number five by raking in \$1.2 million at the Nippon box office.

Website: www.bleach-movie.com (Japanese)



BLEACH: Memories of Nobody



Star Wars: The Clone Wars

Star Wars: The Clone Wars

Warner Bros., August 15

Director: Dave Filoni (supervising dir.); Brian O'Connell, Dave Bullock, Rob Coleman, Justin Ridge, George Samiiski

Cast: Matt Lanter, Greg Ellis, Anthony Daniels, Ian Abercrombie, Matthew Wood

Story: This first animated *Star Wars* feature in theaters (produced by LucasFilm Animation in Marin County and Singapore) will take audiences on adventures featuring Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Padme Amidala, along with new heroes including Anakin's padawan learner, Ahsoka. A host of sinister villains, led by Palpatine, Count Dooku and General Grievous, are poised to rule the galaxy and the fate of the *Star Wars* universe rests in the hands of the daring Jedi Knights.

The Buzz: *Star Wars* creator George Lucas started out his film school career in animation, and is no stranger to the genre. To realize his goal of creating an animated feature to expand the SW universe he created a brand new studio from scratch. In a recent Q&A on the official site, Lucas was particularly excited about the new padawan, Ahsoka. "She's very feisty. She's very outgoing and independent-minded," he says of Anakin's scrappy young learner, "She's turned out really fantastic."

Website: www.starwars.com/theclonewars

Year of the Fish

Gigantic Releasing, August 29

Director: David Kaplan

Cast: Ken Leung, Tsai Chin, Randall Duk Kim, An Nguyen

Story: A modern day Cinderella story about an optimistic young girl who travels to New York in hopes of earning money to send home to her ailing father. However, she is scammed by her father's distant cousin and forced to work in a seedy Chinatown massage parlor. When she refuses to be a sex worker, she becomes the shop's much abused maid. Her only solace comes when a sidewalk fortune teller gives her a magic goldfish.

The Buzz: Using a digital paint rotoscoping-like technique, Kaplan delivers a dark but graphically alive film that is reminiscent of Richard Linklater's works *Waking Life* and *A Scanner Darkly*.

continued on page 32

A 'new' kind of super hero...



CODER MAN

Direct to DVD - 66 min TV Series - 22 x 26 Episodes in production

Producer - Biren Ghose Writer - John Gatehouse Creative Direction - Navdeep Malhotra Studio - Kilnidea

Upload!!

Mani Subramaniam is a smart guy with a big secret! Mani is a university professor and a specialist in nanophotonic, fragmentoid, hydroastronomical computer programming (yes, it's as complicated as it sounds.). With a twist of his belt and the unique battle cry

"UPLOAD!!", Mani is transformed into Coder Man! The scourge of super villains, criminals, and pesky aliens everywhere! Joining him in his mission are "Zip" and "Chip" (his kids, Maya and Rajiv). Watch this terrific trio make their way to and fro their encounters by 'body surfing' the Internet as they take on a variety of baddies. Of course, they always manage to get home in time for dinner..... well almost always!

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SECRETS OF THE SEVEN SOUNDS

Format: Animated Feature 90 minutes
Direct to DVD TV Series 26 eps x 26 min
Genre: Action/Adventure/Comedy
Target age: 8-14 year olds and family

A Deepak Chopra and
Shekhar Kapur Production

Produced by - Biren Ghose

Co-produced by - Virgin Animation

Associate Producer - Aparna Upadhyaya

Creative Direction - Rajiv Maikhuri

Studio - ettamina studios

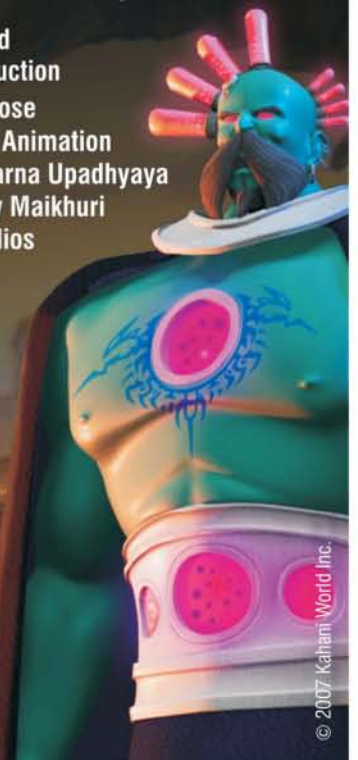
Seven Sounds is a relentless roller coaster ride set in a futuristic society. A story of two brothers embarking on a journey in search for a kidnapped princess where they discover several unbelievable characters besides of course, their potential. It's an epic journey through unimaginable landscapes, a fast paced, edge-of-the-seat race against time to gain the SECRETS OF THE SEVEN SOUNDS, before Hali Maka, an apostle of evil, does so to spread his dominion over the whole world!

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Dossier

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Fly Me to the Moon

Summit Entertainment, Aug. 22

Director: Ben Stassen

Cast: Christopher Lloyd, Kelly Ripa, Tim Curry, Ed Begley Jr., Buzz Aldrin, Robert Patrick, Adrienne Barbeau
Story: Three ambitious flies hope to be the first lunar insects by hitching a ride on Apollo 11, but when they appear in the background of TV footage broadcasting back to Earth they make a couple dangerous enemies: a NASA teamster who reports them to the crew as "contaminants" and a group of Russian flies who are outraged that the Americans might beat them to the moon!

The Buzz: This Cold War comedy is being produced in full 3-D by Belgium's nWave Pictures. If you've been to any Belgian theme parks lately, you may have seen a 13-minute version playing there in advance of the film's release (if you have, don't go blabbing any spoilers. We can't all holiday in Europe, you know!).

Website: www.flymetothemoonthemovie.com

Journey to Saturn

A. Film, September 26 (Denmark)

Directors: Kresten Vestbjerg Andersen, Thorbjørn Christoffersen, Craig Frank

Cast: Iben Hjejle, Casper Christensen, Frank Hvam, Ali Kazim, Lasse Rimmer, Lars Hjortshøj

Story: When an incompetent crew of Danish astronauts travelling to Saturn unwittingly instigate an alien invasion of their homeland, the Danish people become slaves to the space creatures. Against all odds, the bumbling Dansk-ironauts journey back to Earth to save their people from the tyrannical aliens.

The Buzz: *Journey* is being touted hyper-accurately as "the first 3D-animated space comedy ever produced in Europe." The wacky hijinks definitely skew toward adult sensibilities, but doesn't everything else in Denmark? Be sure to check out Craig Frank's production blog at www.rejsentilsaturn.blogspot.com (yes, it's in English!).

Website: www.rejsentilsaturn.dk



Fly Me to the Moon



Brendan and the Secret of Kells

Mia et le Migou (Mia and the Migou)

Gébéka Films, December 3 (France)

Director: Jacques-Rémy Gierd

Cast: Dany Boon, Jean-Pierre Coffe, Maïté, Yolande Moreau

Story: After the death of her mother, an eight-year-old girl leaves her village to search for her father and meets the fantastic creatures known as The Migous.

The Buzz: Associate producer Folimage will give a much-anticipated sneak peek of *Mia* at this month's Annecy festival alongside a presentation by Gierd on the evolution of the film.

Light of Olympia

Santoon Production, Summer 2008

Director: San Wei Chan

Cast: Debbie Reynolds, Phyllis Diller, Tom Gibis

Story: A young hero named Pelops (Gibis/Diller) wins the heart of the princess Hippodameia by defeating her father's enemies and saving their city. In honor of his victory, the king invites heroes from all over the land to compete in challenges of strength and skill.

The Buzz: Formerly titled *Blaze of Glory*, this CG feature tells the story of the origin of the Olympic Games in ancient Greece. Chinese animation house Santoon has given the characters a cool, stylized look. We'll certainly hear more as the release draws nearer.

Website: www.blazeofglorythemovie.com

Mommy Moo and Crow (Mamma Mu och Kråkan)

AB Svensk Filmindustri, September 19 (Sweden and Germany)

Director: Igor Veyshtagin

Story: 2D animated property based on popular Swedish children's book about a talented cow who loves to participate in human activities like biking and skating.

The Buzz: We'd tell you more if we spoke Swedish—sorry! All we know is the project is a collaboration between SF, Telepool and Studio Baestarts, and it sure looks adorable.

Sunshine Barry & the Disco Worms

Radar Film/Crone Film, October 10 (Denmark)

Director: Thomas Borch Nielsen

Story: Barry is your average every-worm stuck in a deadend bottom rung job at the composting plant. His life is turned upside down when he discovers an old disco record and realizes his destiny: To be the world's greatest disco star! And he won't let his lack of limbs, talent or bandmates get in the way.

The Buzz: When we first caught wind of this project during Cartoon Movie 2007, the general consensus was: "...What?" But the more we hear and see of little Barry and his squirmly pals, we have to admit that, unlike the film's hero, this project has definitely got legs. Radar Film has done a great job on the animation, and you have to admit that there's no way to explain the plot without smiling.

Igor

The Weinstein Company, October 17

Director: Anthony Leondis

Cast: John Cusack, Steve Buscemi, John Cleese, Eddie Izzard, Jennifer Coolidge, Jay Leno, Molly Shannon, Sean Hayes, Arsenio Hall, James Lipton

Story: Igor (Cusack), a mad scientist's hunchbacked lab assistant, has but one humble dream: to win the grand prize at the annual Evil Science Fair.

The Buzz: Chris McKenna's (*American Dad!*) playful script is being delivered by Exodus Film Group in super cool CG animation. Rounded out by an amazing voice cast that reads like a who's-who of comedy, this film is just what the (evil) doctor ordered for the Halloween season.

Website: www.igormovie.co.uk

Brendan and the Secret of Kells

Cartoon Saloon/Les Armateurs, October 22 (Belgium)

Director: Tomm Moore

Story: Brendan, a 12-year-old orphan being raised within the thick walls of Kells Abbey by a strict Abbot, sets out on a dangerous adventure in order to help his new friend Brother Aidan—a master illuminator—complete the beautiful tome known as the Book of Kells.

The Buzz: Previously titled *Brendan and the Book of Kells*, this beautiful 2D production takes artistic cues from ancient Celtic design elements and rich, magical palette. Keep on top of the latest news on Moore's production blog, theblogofkells.blogspot.com.

Madagascar: The Crate Escape

DreamWorks, November 7

Director: Eric Darnell, Tom McGrath

Cast: Ben Stiller, Jada Pinkett Smith, Chris Rock, David Schwimmer, Andy Richter

Story: Alex the lion and co. are once again stranded—this time in Africa, where Alex is reunited with his family (who can't quite make out his New York accent) and gets reacquainted with his animal instincts.

The Buzz: Also known as *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*, this is the second film in what DreamWorks intends to turn into a *Shrek*-like franchise. Keep your fingers crossed in hopes that the king of the lemurs has stowed away for this adventure!

Website: www.madagascar-themovie.com

continued on page 34



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Dossier

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Bolt

Disney, November 26

Directors: Chris Williams, Byron Howard

Cast: John Travolta, Miley Cyrus, Susie Essman, Mark Walton

Story: Bolt is used to being feared and revered as the star of his action-packed TV show; so much so that he believes that he actually has super-pup powers. When he is accidentally separated from the studio, the German Shepherd teams up with a lady cat named Mr. Mittens and a hamster named Rhino and embarks on a series of misadventures that show him that you can't believe everything you see on TV.

The Buzz: This furry tale was originally known as *American Dog* and was to be written and directed by Chris Sanders (*Lilo & Stitch*), but due to creative differences upon the arrival of John Lasseter at the studio, Sanders was replaced and the story and character designs re-vamped. The film's new look is inspired by American painter Edward Hopper and utilizes non-photorealistic rendering to make the 3D backgrounds look painted; an effect that resulted in 10 patents for the studio.

2009

Coraline

Focus Features, Feb. 6, 2009

Director: Henry Selick

Cast: Dakota Fanning, Teri Hatcher, Ian McShane

Story: Coraline Jones finds herself bored and unhappy in her new home with foreign neighbors all around her. Then, the young girl discovers that the brick wall behind a door in her flat leads to another world where she finds a better version of her life now. Based on Neil Gaiman's award-winning children's novella, the world Coraline enters into is created by her Other Mother to provide her with joy and entertainment.

The Buzz: Author Gaiman's been quoted by RottenTomatoes.com calling the animation "gorgeous and glorious," and from what we've seen we have to agree. *Coraline* is sure to translate well on the big screen with humor, sweetness and surreality—and some kickin' They Might Be Giants tracks!

Website: www.focusfeatures.com

A Monster in Paris (Un Monstre à Paris)

Bibo Films/Eurocorps, April 2009 (France)

Director: Eric "Bibo" Bergeron

Cast: Vanessa Paradis, Kevin Kline, Ramzy Bedia, Eric Judor

Story: A shy projectionist and an eccentric inventor find themselves trying to capture a mysterious monster roaming the cobbled streets of 1910 Paris. But as they continue their search (encountering plenty of colorful characters), it seems that the creature they hunt might not be the fiend it's been made out to be.

The Buzz: We can expect great things from monsieur Bergeron, who in the past helmed DreamWorks projects *Shrek* and *The Road to El Dorado* and is now back in his native France. To top it off, the much-celebrated Luc Besson (*Arthur and the Invisibles*) has taken on production duties. A quick Google search will get you some teaser art that'll make you say "Ooh la la!"

Website: www.un-monstre-a-paris.fr

Up

Disney/Pixar, May 29, 2009

Directors: Peter Docter, Bob Peterson

Cast: Christopher Plummer, John Ratzenberger, Edward Asner, Paul Eiding, Jordan Nagai

Story: A CG-animated "coming of age" story about a 70-something-year-old man whose dull life in a dingy old house is turned upside down when he meets a clueless young Wilderness Ranger and joins him on adventures around the globe; fighting beasts and villains (and eating dinner at 3:30 p.m.).

The Buzz: Just the thing to teach young whippersnappers some respect! This comedic adventure will be Pixar's tenth feature film and the very first to be presented in Disney Digital 3-D, which will be the perfect venue for all the high-flying elder abuse.

Homiez (Les Lascars)

Bac Films, June 2009 (France)

Directors: Albert Pereira Lazaro, Emmanuel Klotz

Cast: Vincent Cassel, Diane Kruger, Omar et Fred, Gilles Lelouche

Story: While looking for a summer job, Jose meets a girl from the suburbs and falls in love. But when his best pal comes back to town with plans to be the next big gangster, Jose's dreams get sidetracked.

The Buzz: Based on Millimages' interstitial series of the same name and originally slated for a 2008 release, *Les Lascars* is a graphically edgy 2D film that deals with issues of tolerance, ethnicity and the choices we face.

Website: www.millimages.com

9

Focus Features, December 26

Director: Shane Acker

Cast: Jennifer Connelly, Christopher Plummer, Elijah Wood, John C. Reilly, Crispin Glover, Martin Landau

Story: Based on the Oscar-nominated short, 9 takes place in a post-apocalyptic world parallel to our own in which the very legacy of humanity is threatened. A team of CG-animated mobile rag dolls band together to eke out an existence in this nightmarish reality and form a community of their own.

The Buzz: With Acker re-upping his directorial duties and production credits going to spookmeister Tim Burton and Russian horror pro Timur Bekmambetov (director of *Night Watch* and the up-coming *Wanted*), this twisted feature with animated CG courtesy of Luxembourg's Attitude Studio will be a welcome break from the usual saccharine holiday line-up.

Website: www.focusfeatures.com

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

Sony, March 27, 2009

Directors: Phil Lord, Chris Miller

Story: Based on Ron and Judi Barret's beloved children's book, this Sony Animation production takes reveals the origins of the town of Chewandswallow, which experiences episodes of mashed potato snow and raining soup brought on by a scientist's attempt to end world hunger. But when the town is threatened by a catastrophic flood of foodstuffs, the people will have to get creative to save their homes.

The Buzz: This was the first project put into production at SPA, announced in 2006, and they've been keeping a tight lid on its progress.

Monsters vs. Aliens

DreamWorks Animation, March 27, 2009

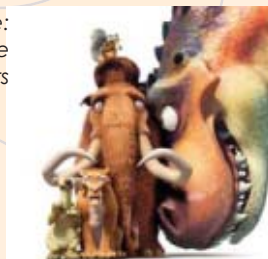
Directors: Rob Letterman, Conrad Vernon

Cast: Reese Witherspoon, Hugh Laurie, Will Arnett, Seth Rogen, Stephen Colbert, Kiefer Sutherland, Rainn Wilson, Paul Rudd

Story: When a mysterious glob of space goo transforms Susan Murphy into a nearly 50 ft. tall "monster" named Ginormica, she is captured by the military and held in a secret compound. There she meets other monsters which have been quietly concealed in the base over the years. The misfit monsters are set loose when an evil alien robot begins rampaging around Earth, leading to an epic battle!

The Buzz: What does DreamWorks do better than monsters? This super cool beastie brawl flick caught our attention with cute and goofy character designs and some cheeky casting (TV's crotchety Dr. House, Hugh Laurie, appears as Dr. Cockroach; American hero Stephen Colbert is The President). It's being produced in true 3-D, so save your pennies for the IMAX experience.

Ice Age:
Dawn of the
Dinosaurs



Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs

Fox/Blue Sky, July 1, 2009

Director: Carlos Saldanha

Cast: John Leguizamo, Queen Latifah, Denis Leary, Ray Romano, Seann William Scott, Josh Peck, Chris Wedge

Story: The Ice Age is getting a bit crowded in this upcoming threequel which introduces the familiar mammalian amigos to some scaly new neighbors.

The Buzz: Not much had been revealed about *Dawn of the Dinosaurs* after Fox's Hutch Parker announced the project in early 2007, but fans finally got a glimpse of what's in store when a teaser trailer played before showing of Fox/Blue Sky's *Horton Hears A Who!* this year. Finally, a dinosaur-riddled family comedy that makes no mention of *The Land Before Time*!

Website: www.iceagemovie.com

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Dossier

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Planet 51

New Line, July 24, 2009

Director: Jorge Blanco

Cast: Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Jessica Biel, Justin Long, Seann William Scott

Synopsis: Captain Charles Baker lands his spaceship on a planet inhabited by paranoid creatures who have two antennae, eight fingers and live in fear of alien invasion. They live in a world similar to suburban Earth in the 1950s, with sci-fi flicks, gory comic books and paranoid army generals barking about monsters from outer space. Lem, whose back garden Baker lands in, must keep him safe from the authorities and help him get back home.

The Buzz: New Line jumped on the distro rights to this CG flick by Madrid-based Ilion Animation Studios before production had even wrapped. Talk about a vote of confidence! The plot has a lot of potential in the animation genre, and with an all-star voice cast we're hoping to see some late July fireworks when this opens.

The Fantastic Mr. Fox

Revolution Studios, November 6, 2009

Director: Wes Anderson

Cast: George Clooney, Cat Blanchett, Bill Murray, Jason Schwartzman, Anjelica Huston

Story: Based on the beloved Roald Dahl novel about a crafty fox who constantly outwits the obnoxious and mean-spirited local farmers.

The Buzz: The project was begun by Joe Roth's Revolution Studios, but was taken over by Fox Animation after the studio folded. Director Anderson has referred to Dahl as one of his heroes, and has been lending his unique approach to the film after the departure of co-director Henry Selick (to work on Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*). Voice acting has been recorded in all locations except the studio, and real plants and natural elements have been incorporated into the stop-motion sets.

Yona Yona Penguin

Madhouse/Denis Friedman Productions, December 2009 (Japan)

Director: Rintaro

Story: A six-year-old girl who slips out at night to roam the streets dressed as a penguin is taken to a mysterious subterranean world, where she is mistaken for a fabled bird and agrees to help the underground goblins fight off the Emperor of Darkness. (Oh, another one of THOSE!)

The Buzz: Famed director Rintaro (*Galaxy Express 999*, *Metropolis*) will helm Madhouse's first ever 3D CG feature. The studio is producing three different versions of the film: one for the Japanese market (with the original script), one for French audiences and yet another for English-speaking territories, which may help overcome the cultural story-telling gap that has let so many anime masterpieces fall through the U.S. box office cracks.

Hotel Transylvania

Columbia, September 25, 2009

Director: Jill Culton

Story: It's *Romeo and Juliet* meets *Monster Mash* in this CG-animated tale of Simon Van Helsing's (of the vampire stabbin' Van Helsing) forbidden love for the luscious daughter of Dracula.

The Buzz: After undergoing a couple story changes as well as switching directors (Culton took over from fellow Open Season alums Anthony Stacchi and David Feiss) and being pushed back to make room for *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, this spooky Sony gem is finally on-track to get polished up and ready for release at the tail end of '09.

Memory Hotel

Heinrich Sabl Filmproduktion, Fall 2009

Director: Heinrich Sabl

Story: At the end of the Great War (that'd be WWI for those of you who went to a U.S. public school), a Russian soldier and a young orphan set up shop as proprietor and kitchen maid of a hotel. This emotional film centers on the orphan Sophie's struggle to find the happiness that was denied her as a child.

The Buzz: This stunning film took director Sabl (who has previously shocked audiences with his short works) nine years to complete, while he supplemented his filmmaking with odd jobs. His devotion clearly shines through in this stop-motion gem, which will hopefully make decent festival rounds after debuting at Cartoon Movie in Germany.

The Princess and the Frog

Disney, December 18, 2009

Directors: Ron Clements, John Musker

Cast: Anika Noni Rose, Jennifer Lewis, Keith David, Ritchie Montgomery, Jennifer Cody

Story: A "modern" fairytale about a young girl named Tiana living in New Orleans' historic French Quarter during the Jazz Age.

The Buzz: As Disney's first 2D-animated film since 2004's *Home on the Range*, and the first-ever Mouse House feature with an African-American heroine, *Princess* has been the subject of much scrutiny. It seems all the kinks have been worked out, and hopefully with some gorgeous art, Disney magic and music by New Orleans native Randy Newman *Princess* will tip-toe thru the racial minefield and become just another well-loved classic.



2010

How to Train Your Dragon

DreamWorks, March 26, 2010

Director: Peter Hastings

Cast: Gerard Butler, Jonah Hill, America Ferrera, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Jay Baruchel

Story: Based on the children's book by Cressida Cowell, *Dragon* centers on the son of a Viking chief, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III, who struggles to turn his scraggly, toothless dragon into a fearless winged fighting machine.

The Buzz: Another misfit-magical-tween fantasy series being adapted to the big screen. So far news on the production has been hush-hush, only rippling the web when the film's release was pushed back a year to give it more breathing room.

Rapunzel

Disney, Christmas-ish 2010

Directors: Glen Keane, Dean Wellins

Cast: Kristin Chenoweth, Kevin Linehan

Story: Based on the classic Brothers Grimm fairytale about a scrappy young princess who escapes her cruel tower-bound imprisonment with the help of her lengthy locks.

The Buzz: Originally announced as the "edgier" *Rapunzel: Unbraided*, the film has been re-tooled to return to Disney's classic princess movie aesthetic, albeit with a unique CG look. *Rapunzel*'s concept and character art features a palette and softness inspired by Jean-Honoré Fragonard's beautiful Rococo painting *The Swing*. Disney intends to utilize non-photorealistic rendering to give the clean look of CGI a painterly quality that flows with the art direction. Absolutely *magnifique!* ■

Shrek Goes Fourth

DreamWorks, May 21, 2010

Director: Mike Mitchell

Cast: Mike Myers, Cameron Diaz, Eddie Murphy, Antonio Banderas

Story: The further, further adventures of that lovable green dude from the land of far, far away.

The Buzz: There are many disparate plot points floating around: Jeffrey Katzenberg has stated that this film will "reveal [Shrek's] story" and explain just how he ended up in a swamp; starlet Diaz has asked for an eco-friendly storyline, a deleted *Shrek the Third* scene may come into play and, most recently, we hear that things may take a darker turn with the arrival of Donkey's evil twin!

Toy Story 3

Disney/Pixar, June 18, 2010

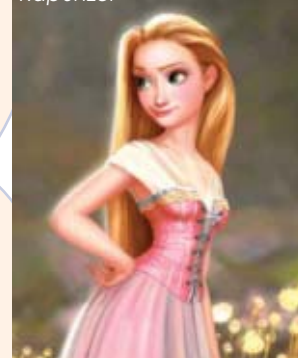
Director: Lee Unkrich

Cast: Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Joan Cusack, John Ratzenberger, Wallace Shawn, Don Rickles

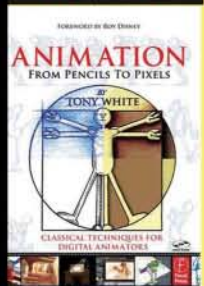
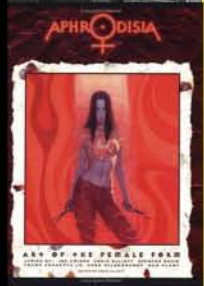
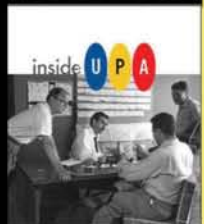
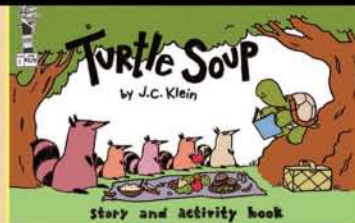
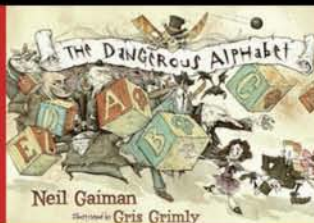
Story: After a too-long hiatus, everyone's favorite wooden cowboy and suped up spaceman Woody and Buzz are back in action. This third installment kicks off as our heroes and the rest of their toy-box friends are dumped at a daycare after owner Andy goes off to college.

The Buzz: Originally set to be produced by Disney off-shoot Circle 7, Pixar took over the reigns and completely revamped the project. With a stellar production team including Unkrich, who co-directed *Toy Story 2*, and screenwriter Michael Arndt (*Little Miss Sunshine*) the project seems to be blossoming back in Pixar's familiar, capable hands.

Rapunzel



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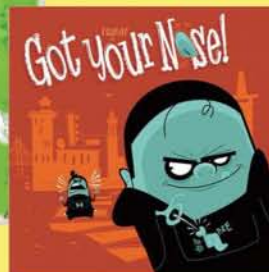
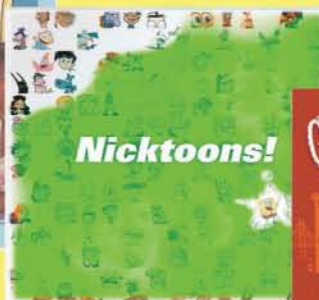
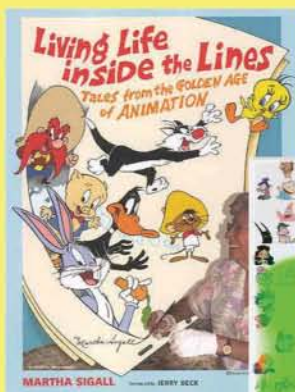
www.animationbooklook.com

Authors

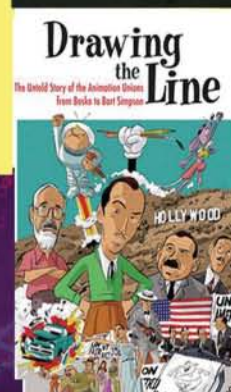
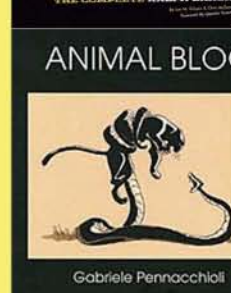
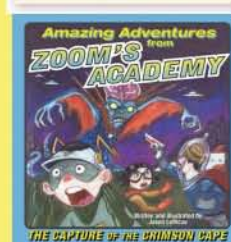
Book
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Featuring
Artists and Authors
from Animation
and more...

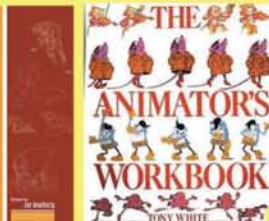


Over 45 authors and artists under one roof:

Jerry Beck, Toby Bluth, Tee Bosustow, Stefan Bucher, David Colman, Craig Elliott, Gris Grimly, Mike Kunkel, Dave Kupczyk, Rik Maki, Patrick Morgan, Steve Niles, Phil and Brian Phillipson, Gabriele Pennacchioli, Eric Pigors, Ragnar, Martha Sigall, Stephen Silver, Tom Sito, Tony White, Willie Ito and many more...



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Dossier

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Release Dates To Be Announced

Agent Crush

Fantastic Films

Director: Sean Robinson

Cast: Ioan Gruffudd, Brian Blessed, Neve Campbell, Brian Cox, Roger Moore

Story: Crush is an accident-prone robotic secret agent created to fight crime on a global scale ... unfortunately he has a few glitches that need to be worked out before he and his inventor sidekicks can stop the first agent prototype from ridding the world of its human inhabitants.

Website: www.agentcrush.com

Astro Boy

Warner Bros.

Director: David Bowers

Cast: Freddie Highmore

Story: In the futuristic Metro City, a brilliant but bereaved scientist constructs an incredible robot in the likeness of his dead son. However the 'bot, Astro Boy, cannot fulfill his creator's expectations and sets out on an adventure in search of acceptance.

Website: www.imagi.com.hk

Bedtime Stories (Papa Raconte)

Gébeka Films

Director: Jean-Christophe Roger

Cast: Dany Boon, Omat and Fred, Virginie Hocaq

Story: An imaginative father makes up wild stories for his children at bedtime in this 2D animated feature.

Website: www.gebekafilms.com

Bunyan and Babe

Exodus Film Group

Director: Jim Rygiel

Cast: John Goodman, Eddie Griffin
Story: Two children living on their grandfather's farm in Minnesota discover a cave where the massive folkloric hero Paul Bunyan and his equally giant blue ox, Babe, have been living in secret since they disappeared from the Dead Forest.

Website: www.exodusfilmgroup.com

A Case for Friends ... How it All Began

MotionWorks/Jugendfilm

Lizenzerwertung/2d3D/Enamation

Directors: Tony Loeser, Jesper Möller

Story: The charming tale of a super-star wannabe mouse, a vain rooster and an ever-hungry pig who team up to rescue a kidnapped lamb from the wicked wolf.

Website: www.motionworks-halle.com

Delgo

Fathom Studio, Electric Eye

Directors: Marc F. Adler, Jason Maurer

Cast: Anne Bancroft, Val Kilmer, Freddie Prinze Jr., Jennifer Love Hewitt, Chris Kattan, Kelly Ripa, Eric Idle, Michael Clarke Duncan, Burt Reynolds, Louis Gossett Jr., Malcolm McDowell

Story: In a fantasy land divided by a conflict between two peoples, an adventurous but naïve teen named Delgo must lead his friends

to save their world from being torn apart by the warring factions.

Website: www.delgo.com

Dragon Hunters

Futurikon/Mac Guff Ligne/

LuxAnimation/Trixter (released in France in late March)

Directors: Guillaume Ivernel, Arthur Qwak

Cast: Vincent Lindon, Patrick Timsit, Philippe Nahon, Amanda Lear, Marie Drion, Jeremy Prevost

Story: Two mismatched men in a futuristic world made up of multitudes of small islands hunt down the cruel (and very hungry) dragons who have invaded their world. Will they ever realize their dream of settling down to start a mussel farm in this eat-or-be-eaten reality?

Website: www.dragonhunters-themovie.com

Escape from Planet Earth

The Weinstein Co.

Director: Tony Leech

Story: A motley group of aliens stranded on planet Earth break out of their prison on the top-secret Area 51 base.

Website: <http://weinsteinco.com>

Fabulous Fat Fish

Cubix and Kosmic

Director: Mike Woo

Story: A chubby toy named Fab Fat Fish and his Toy Clan join forces to battle an evil Game-Genie to set free Princess Luna.

Website: www.cubixkosmic.com

Foodfight!

Lions Gate/

Threshold

Entertainment

Director: Lawrence Kasanoff

Cast: Charlie Sheen, Hilary Duff, Greg Ellis, Haylie Duff, Eva Longoria Parker, Christopher Lloyd, Chris Kattan, Wayne Brady

Story: What happens to all the various food products and

produce at your local grocery store after the lights go out? According to *Foodfight!*: utter chaos.

Website: www.foodfight.com

Fraggle Rock: The Movie

Disney/Universal

Producers: Lisa Henson, Brian Henson, Ahmet Zappa

Cast: Kathryn Mullen, Kevin Clash, Steve Whitmire

Story: Jim Henson's loveable cave dwellers venture out into the human world in this puppet-animation/live-action musical fantasy.

Gatchaman

Warner Bros./Weinstein Co./Imagi

Story: A classic Japanese superhero team set-up: When the nefarious technogeek villains of Galactor threaten the Earth, a group of teenagers are recruited to become ninja heroes with cool powers some snazzy bird-themed outfits.

Website: www.imagi.com.hk

Gnomeo and Juliet

Miramax

Director: Kelly Asbury

Cast: Kate Winslet

Story: Shakespeare's familiar tale of two star-crossed lovers is re-imagined in a world of warring tribes of indoor and outdoor gnomes. You can't make this stuff up, people.

The Hero of Color City

Magnolia Pictures, Exodus

Director: Becky Bristow

Story: A plucky group of colorfully diverse crayons must protect their magical homeland from a tyrannical villain who abhors happiness and color.

Website: www.exodusfilmgroup.com

Idiots and Angels

Bill Plympton Studios

Director: Bill Plympton

Story: A greedy, selfish man awakens one morning to find a pair of angel wings growing out of his back. Despite his ill-intended attempts to use them, the wings seem to have a will of their own.



that forces him to do good.

Website: www.idiotsandangels.com

Jasper-The Movie

Toons 'n' Tales/Amuse/Dacodac

Director: Eckart Fingberg

Story: Two adventurous penguin brothers, Jasper and Junior, live by an Antarctic seaport and set out to help their nine-year-old human pal, Emma, retrieve the eggs of an endangered parrot species from the evil Dr. Block.

The Legend of Secret Pass

JC2 Animated Entertainment, 310 Studios, David Lords Productions

Director: Steve Trenbirth

Cast: Frankie Muniz, Ron Perlman, Cheryl Hines, David Cross, Joe Pantoliano, Michael Chiklis, Graham Greene

Story: Set against beautiful Arizona landscapes, this epic CG-animated adventure follows the journey of a young boy who has to discover his true legacy and fight a dark, malevolent spirit.

Website: <http://legendofsecretpass.com>

Megalomania

Curious Pictures

Directors: Michel Gondry and Paul Gondry

Story: Two childhood friends are torn apart when they take separate positions of power in the political upheaval of the apocalyptic near-future world.

Mighty Mouse

Nickelodeon

Story: We're not sure of the details, but if the series is anything to go by you can bet on high-flyin' crime fightin' and a witty pun or two.

The Missing Lynx (Paws on the Run)

Kandor Graphics/Perro Verde/Yaya! Films/Six Sales

Directors: Manuel Sicilia, Raul Garcia

Cast: Antonio Banderas

Story: A group of animals try to escape from a hunter hired by an unscrupulous millionaire.

Website: www.themissinglynxmovie.com

Mocland, the Legend of the Aloma

Grupo Forma Animada, Canal Plus

Director: Juan Manuel Suarez
Story: The dethroned queen of

the planet Moc sends out an expedition to find the legendary energy-granting mineral, Aloma, in order to defeat the planet's evil invader.

Website: www.mocland.com

Niko & the Way to the Stars

The Weinstein Company

Directors: Michael Hegner, Kari Juusonen

Story: Niko is a young reindeer whose father is part of Santa's flying sleigh team—the coolest reindeers around! However, because of this, Niko has never met him. When the Black Wolf

and his gang attack his homeland, Niko and his surrogate flying squirrel father, Julius, go on a dangerous mission to find his real dad and save Christmas.

Website: www.nikomovie.com

The Power of the Dark Crystal

Odyssey Ent.

Director: Genndy Tartakovsky

Cast: Billie Whitelaw, Lisa Maxwell, Barry Dennen, Kathryn Mullen and more voices

Story: Many years after *The Dark Crystal* takes place, Jen and Kira are visited by Thurma the fire girl, who begs them to share a piece of the crystal to restore the energy of her people's dying sun. When they refuse, Thurma shatters the crystal, takes a piece with her and plunges the world into a series of chaotic events.

Sin City 2

MGM

Directors: Frank Miller, Robert Rodriguez

Cast: Clive Owen, Rachel Weisz, Jessica Alba, Rosario Dawson, Mickey Rourke, Michael Madsen, Michael Clark Duncan, Brittany Murphy, Devon Aoki, Danny Trejo, Jaime King

Story: This sequel will combine two storylines; one based off the graphic novel installment *A Dame to Kill For*, in which Dwight (Owen) seeks to clear his name after being wronged by a treacherous old flame, and a prequel-ish story which explains Dwight's "new face" and his past with the gun toting Old Town prostitutes. Concurrently, Nancy (Alba) is grieving the death of her



Sita Sings the Blues



The Three Robbers

protector, Detective Hartigan.

Sing to the Dawn

MediaCorp, Raintree Pictures, Singapore's Media Development Authority, Infinite Frameworks.

Director: Phil Mitchell

Story: Based on Singapore writer Ho Minfong's popular book, the CG-animated feature follows a young girl from a rural village who fulfills her dreams by winning a scholarship to study in the city.

Website: www.frameworks.com.sg

Sita Sings the Blues

Nina Paley Prods.

Director: Nina Paley

Cast: Reenah Shah, Debargo Sanyal, Pooja Kumar

Story: Sita is a goddess who is kidnapped by a demon and

separated from her husband, Rama, and seeks to reunite with him with the help of more colorful deities.

Website: www.sitasingstheblues.com

The Smurfs

Paramount Pictures

Director: Colin Brady

Cast: John Lithgow and Julia Sweeney (rumored)

Story: Based on the Emmy-award winning cartoon series: The Smurfs inhabit a magical forest and do their best to foil the plots of their wicked warlock enemy, Gargamel.

Website: www.smurf.com

The Spirit of the Forest

Dygra Films, Fantastic Films

Directors: David Rubin, Juan Carlos Pena

Cast: Anjelica Huston, Ron Perlman, Sean Astin, Giovanni Ribisi

Story: This CG-animated feature centers on a group of forest animals who band together to stop the building of a massive highway through their homes.

Website: www.dygrafilms.es

The Three Robbers

Animation X, GmbH, Toon City, X-Films, Weinstein Co.

Director: Hayo Freitag

Story: Three crafty robbers travel through the rural countryside, pilfering as they go—until they meet a young orphan girl who opens their eyes. Based on the beloved children's book by Tomi Ungerer.

Website: www.dreiraeuber-derfilm.de

ThunderCats

Warner Bros.

Director: Jerry O'Flaherty

Story: An origin story for Lion-O and his fabulous feline gang with a coming-of-age twist.

Website: Details are being tracked on fan blog www.thundercats-the-movie.net ■

Big-Screen Buzz: News About Productions Around the Globe

Small Wonders

The new CG-animated feature *The Fixies* exposes little creatures that have kept household machines humming through the years.

Remember the premise of the hugely popular 1984 movie *The Gremlins* and its sequel? Well, imagine if households were home to little families whose jobs were to fix all the things that go wrong with our machines—think of them as anti-Gremlins! That's the idea of the new 90-minute CG-animated feature *The Fixies*, produced by Moscow-based **Aeroplane Productions** and Sydney's **Mad Cow Pictures**. Produced by industry veterans **Michael Mennies** and **Georgy Vasilyev**, the movie is written by John Loy and John Turman and is slated to be directed by **Steve Trenbirth** (*Jungle Book 2*, *The Legend of Secret Pass*).

"Children love the idea of getting inside parallel worlds," says Mennies, who has been fine-tuning the details of the movie for the last two years. "You have these fascinating characters that kids can relate to, living inside computers and TV receivers and kitchen appliances. Then, there are the different stories about the different members of the Fixies families. One of the Fixies legends surrounds their origins—that they

were born from pieces of the souls of the inventors and craftsmen who created the machines that surround us—they've had different names throughout the year: Repairmites, Mechaniticks, Helpatechs—but we think the most

appropriate name for them is the Fixies."

The movie's plot kicks off with the invention of a new device known as the Hat-O-Matic, which allows Fixies to slip away from people by traveling directly through electric wires. "The plot thickens when Cathode, a Fixie who doesn't want to continue his traditional repair role, steals the hat, and puts all his fellow Fixies in danger. It's up to Quip, Cathode's young brother, to overcome his fears and become a hero to save the day."

According to Mennies, the movie will have an estimated budget of \$18 million and will serve as an anchor for other multi-media projects about the little guys. "We are thinking of launching a site where kids can offer testimonials of their own, explaining how a Fixie helped repair a machine in their own household." The good thing about all the different multi-platform operations involving *The Fixies* is that there's no possibility of anything ever going wrong with the technological tools and servers—unless some evil gremlins attack.

For more info, visit www.aeroplane productions.com or www.thefixies.com.



Mission: Rescue Venice

Fans of **Gruppo Alconi**'s popular animated series *Pet Pals* were thrilled to hear that the six animal adventurers of the project are going to be movie stars in the near future.

Diva (the beautiful and vain duck), Holly (the adventurous cat), Moby (the bookish pooch), Pio (the show biz frog), Top Hat (the athletic rabbit who is in love with Diva) and Nameless (the angelic baby-faced chicken) are ready for their big-screen close-up in a CG-animated feature directed and written by studio founder Sergio Manfio and exec produced by Francesco Manfio, president of Cartoon Italia. The beautiful city of Venice serves as the backdrop for this 80-minute project, which finds our friends on a mission to rescue the historic site from an evil plan hatched by their nemesis, the Crow Witch.

"The idea of creating a movie for the *Pet Pals* came very naturally for us," says Sergio Manfio. "It seemed like the perfect next step: Each of the characters has a very distinctive personality. They represent different facets of a child's personality, so they're quite appealing and easy to relate to." Manfio says he'd been looking for a way to center a story based on the enchanting city of Venice. "The city plays an integral part in the story—In a way, it's the seventh protagonist of the movie."

We have a feeling *The Pet Pals and Marco Polo's Code*, which is slated for a Christmas 2009 theatrical delivery, is bound to put our Italian friends on the map once and for all.

You can find more info at www.alconi.it



Madhouse's Piano Forest Takes Root at Annecy

Masayuki Kojima's *Piano no Mori (Piano Forest)* is one of only two anime features admitted into Annecy this year, and a sharp contrast to its competitor: Shinji Aramaki's post-apocalyptic sci-fi romp, *Appleseed: Ex Machina*. It was also nominated for the Japan Academy Prize for Animation of the Year. Tokyo-based **Madhouse Studios** provided the stunning 2D work, which combined with the haunting score by composer Keisuke Shinohara (*On a Stormy Night*) brought Makoto Isshiki's beloved manga series to life.



The story follows a fifth-grader named Shuei Amamiya, the rich-kid son of a famous pianist who transfers to a new school where he is harassed by a bully, who dares him to go out to the forest and play a mysteriously mute piano. A scrappy local kid from the wrong side of the tracks, Kai Ichinose, comes to Shuei's aid. It turns out that Kai, despite his rough exterior, is the only person that can get sound out of the strange piano. The boys become friends, united by their love of music and

their desire to unravel the mystery of the abandoned instrument—but rivalry also shadows their relationship when Shuei becomes jealous of Kai's untrained talent.

Trailers and clips floating around the Internet will give you a taste of what this lovely film has to offer, and hopefully its arrival in Annecy will help bring it closer to western audiences. In the meantime, since it's 104 yen to the dollar, maybe you can even consider a trip to Japan to catch it.

More info (in Japanese) is available on the official site, www.piano-movie.jp, or at www.annecy.org.

continued on page 41

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Highlights

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Move Over, Hannah Montana!

If you're planning a trip to Argentina this summer, make sure you catch **Illusion Studios'** new 2D-animated feature **Valentina**, which is scheduled to premiere there this July. According to studio CEO **Jose Luis Massa**, the movie centers on the country's licensing hit sensation, which has given Barbie and Hello Kitty a run for their money. "What's interesting is that her success is based on the very essence of her character—her human values, love for nature and respect for friendships," says Massa. "The story is about how this young girl experiences new emotions. In the movie, she and her friends are planning a welcome party to celebrate the arrival of spring. At the same time, she will realize that she's falling in love for the first time."

Valentina is directed by Eduardo Gondell, who has co-directed the studio's hugely successful *Patoruzito* movies along with Massa. Illusion Studios has high hopes for the property and is planning a *Valentina* TV series in conjunction with the movie. In addition, Massa tells us that his studio has the capacity to produce three animated features per year. "We're currently producing two 2D films for 2008—*Valentina* is traditionally animated, and *Boogie* (an older-skewing title co-produced with Spain's Perro Verde) is animated via Toon Boom Harmony. *Boogie*, *The Most Wanted* (a supernatural Western) and *Super Sucio* are three of our projects that target fans of adult animation."

Illusion has a staff of 120 animation artists in Argentina and plans to open a Mexican studio with 25 artists in 2008 as well. "We have restructured the company so that our artists can develop their talent and find a place where their ideas and their creativity can lead to high-quality projects," notes Massa. "That's how we like to define Illusion Studios—as a laboratory of ideas."

For more info, visit www.illusionstudios.com.



Coming of Age in Asia

In 1975, Chinese American novelist Minfong Ho received much praise for her book ***Sing to the Dawn***, a sensitive story about the coming of age of a 14-year-old Asian girl who receives a scholarship to study in a big city, but has to face resistance from her traditional family and society to realize her dreams. More than three decades later, her story has become a full-fledged CG-animated movie, thanks to the efforts of Singapore's **Infinite Frameworks**, the country's **Media Development Authority** and **Mediacorp Raintree Pictures**. Directed by **Phil Mitchell**, an animation veteran who co-created Mainframe's *ReBoot* series, the feature is poised to open in Singapore in June.

The film's co-producer **Mike Wiluan**, managing director of Infinite Frameworks, points out that the original treatment for the film was a flat 2D/Toon Shader look. "The creative team believed that the style wouldn't provide the latitude required for the rich and diverse Asian landscapes, colors and characters we had envisioned," says Wiluan. "This included encapsulating some of the dramatic lighting, stunning sunsets and mysterious mise-en-scene that existed in many of the scenes. We were also conscious of the way the narrative flowed through the art and animation style. It needed to be unique and distinctly Asian. These objectives were set knowing we had to work with existing technology, limited time frame and budget."

According to Wiluan, it took his company just over 30 months to take the film from script development and talent scouting to final delivery. Working with an estimated budget of \$5 million, the producers put together a top-notch creative team which included Mitchell, British CG director Steven Read (*Happy Feet*) and a dedicated crew of 85 in Infinite Frameworks' studio in Batam, Indonesia. The team utilized Softimage | XSI animation software for the movie content, Autodesk's Toxik for compositing, Avid Express for pre-production storyboard animatics and Photoshop, ZBrush, Deep Paint & Particle Illusion for other key aspects of the project.

"Early in the process, we moved the location of the story from Thailand to Indonesia and we felt that we should make use of the wealth

of local references here," recalls Mitchell. "One big thing I wanted to do was steer clear of the accepted CG approach to picture-making by avoiding photorealism. We were fortunate to have access to some wonderful traditional Indonesian artists and decided to draw upon Western-influenced Balinese landscape painting. We've used several of the local South East Asian styles of puppetry too as a means of both varying the visual systems and to introduce a wider audience to these fascinating storytelling traditions. I think we've made something that is accessible, yet has a somewhat unique look and feel."

To learn more about Infinite Frameworks, visit www.frameworks.com.sg.



continued on page 44

...Big Brother in Poland delivered a more than five-fold increase in audience share in its time slot...

...CTC Media takes a stake in Kazakhstan's Channel 31 and plans to launch a new station in Uzbekistan...

...The latest audience share figures in the Czech Republic confirm a sharp upturn in fortunes for CTI...

...The Ukrainian MSO Volia Cable adds 10 new channels to its digital offer bringing the total to 114...

...The Russian television advertising market is worth 24.1% more than in 2006...

...Romanian DTH platform Dolce had already 250,000 subscribers at the end of the summer...

...The Bulgarian sports betting company Eurofootball is about to launch its own TV channel...

...Poland's second largest MSO Vectra, has said that it plans to spend 31.5 million € on the further roll out of its digital TV service...

...The most popular channel in Latvia in June was LNT with an audience share of 18.4%...

...HBO's new subscription video-on-demand service HBO Digital is reported to have made its debut in Hungary...

...Central and Eastern Europe is the fastest growing television marketplace in the world, out pacing by far all other emerging territories...

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...Zenith Optimedia has identified Central and Eastern Europe as one of two regions containing the world's fastest growing ad markets...

...Serbia's Telecommunications Agency has issued licenses to 20 new cable operators...

...Nova TV secures multi year content deal for Croatia...

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Highlights

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Kahani World's Seven Wonders

Biren Ghose discusses his company's promising slate and the rise of India as a prolific provider of original animated content.

It's a widely reported fact that India is the world's biggest producer of live-action movies and delivers over 1,000 titles every year. According to a recent report published by NASSCOM, the country's National Association of Software and Services Companies, there will be a record number of animated features produced in the region as well—the industry is expected to reach \$869 million by 2010, with 26,000 professionals employed by the industry.

One of the companies banking on this phenomenal growth curve is Kahani World, founded by industry veteran Biren Ghose. "This year, we are seeing spotlights on India in many entertainment and media forums across the world," says Ghose. "MIPCOM, NAB, Annecy and NextMedia are only some of the media events that have offered special spotlight or will focus on the growing Indian market. The curiosity, opportunity and amount of investment flowing to this space is creating an expectation and urgency that is

bringing the country's largest corporations and multi-national entities to the fray in this sector."

With offices in Mumbai and Bangalore in India and Thornhill (Ontario, Canada), Kahani World has in place a robust model which allows the production of several projects simultaneously, according to Ghose. "Our unique business model includes in its execution and financing strategy, the participation of production companies," he says. "These studios and the key creators become part of the investment program in developing and producing the projects. This will bring them an exponential return as compared to being just an outsourcing studio."

Kahani World is poised to reap the benefits of seven major projects in

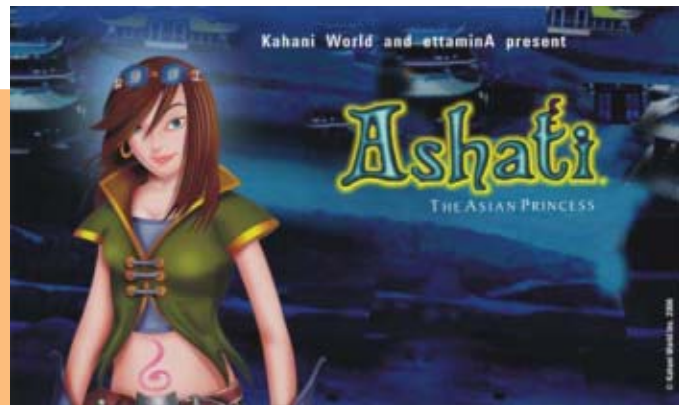
its pipeline: **Secrets of the Seven Sounds**, a joint venture with Virgin Comics is an epic-adventure feature slated for the first quarter of 2009, which centers on the exploits of two brothers and their attempts to save a kidnapped princess. Renowned Indian luminaries Deepak Chopra and Shekar Kapur are attached to this mo-cap and CG-animated feature. **Raju the Rickshaw** is a CG-animated preschool series in the tradition of *Noddy* and *Thomas the Tank Engine*, while **Coderman** is an adventure series about a computer whiz who transforms into a superhero. **Game Access**, is a CG-animated movie co-produced by Nelson Recinos (*Pinky and The Brain*) about kids and the world of videogames and **Chipkali [Gecko] World** is a wonderful project about a family of humans and a clan of lizards sharing the same residential space. Also on the slate is **I-Prin**, an IMAX co-production between Korean, Spanish, Japanese and U.S. partners, which follows the adventures of three young girls at a training academy for princesses. Rounding up Ghose's "Magnificent Seven" is **Ashati—the Asian Princess**, a feature helmed by South Asian director, Srinivas Krishna, about a princess who is determined to find out about her past and to save the world.

Ghose believes that the entire country of India is captivated by entertaining tales told through film and television. "India is a nation rich in folklore and mythology," he notes. "There is a beloved tradition of regaling tales that have entertained children and adults for generations. The entire 'buffet' of Kahani World reflects the overall vision of the company which is to build a highly dynamic entertainment ecosystem by using animated content assets to be leveraged across mobile, console and other platforms in new media."

Kahani World has acquired and deployed digital asset management and movie pipeline processes from the "best in the West," says Ghose. "The Indian film industry has been an early adopter of animated techniques particularly in using vfx for live-action movies and short-form animation. The country's organization and understanding of animation techniques is growing at an unprecedented rate."

When asked about the movie that inspires him the most, Ghose gives us one of his trademark ebullient responses. "Right now, I am bound for *Casablanca*! If there is one movie that inspires most filmmakers it's that wonderful 1942 classic. Every one of Kahani World's properties harbors the ambition to be as unforgettable as that movie."

For more info, visit www.kahaniworld.com.



Biren Ghose

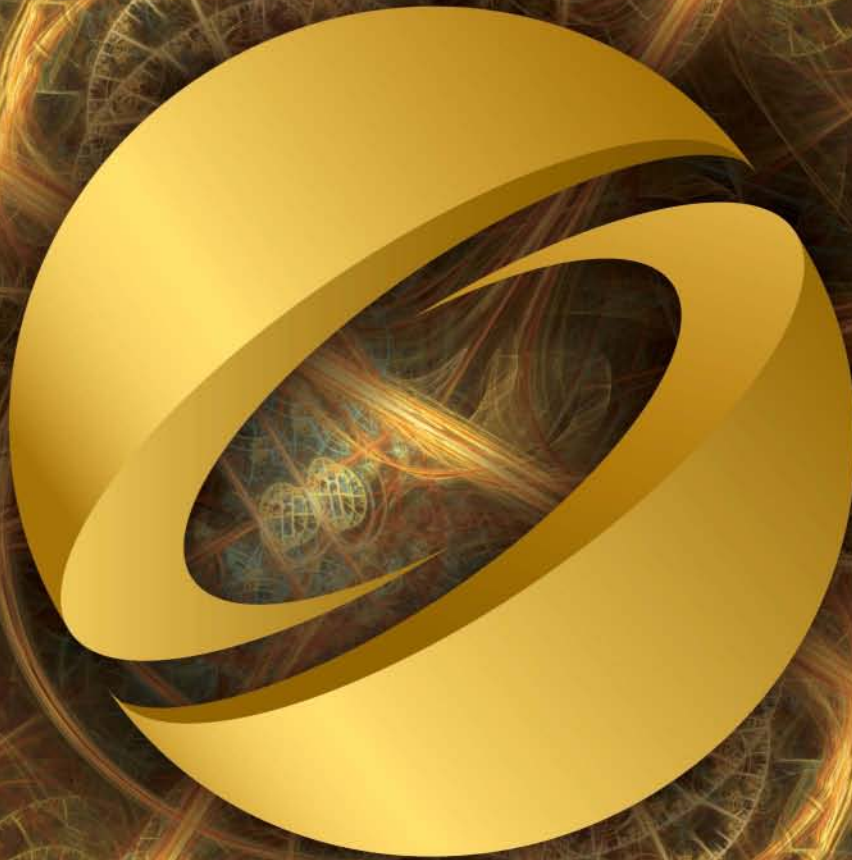


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Remembering Ollie Johnston (1931-2008)

Farewell to the Last of the Nine Old Men:

We knew it had to happen some day, but news of the death of Walt Disney animator Ollie Johnston filled our hearts with sadness last month. The man, whose animation legacy will live on in 24 Disney classics, died of natural causes at a long-term care facility in Sequim, Wash.

Johnston, who joined Disney in 1935 as an inbetweeners on Mickey Mouse cartoons, will forever be remembered for key scenes in many of our beloved movies: the wooden toy's nose growing when he lies to the Blue Fairy in *Pinocchio* (1940); the realistic depiction of the mother deer's death in *Bambi* (1942); a befuddled Mr. Smee trying to follow orders in *Peter Pan* (1953); Baloo the Bear dancing to "The Bare Necessities" in *The Jungle Book* (1967) and the wobbling penguin waiters in *Mary Poppins* (1964) are but a few of Johnston's rich legacy.

Born in Palo Alto, Calif., on Oct. 31, 1912, Johnston was the son of the head of the Romance Language department at Stanford University. He studied art at Stanford, where he met Frank Thomas, who would become his life-long friend and another of the Nine Old Men. Walt Disney gave the name to his key group of animators, playing off President Franklin D. Roosevelt's description of the U.S. Supreme Court. (Thomas was only in his 30s when he became one of the Nine Old Men!)

After graduating, Johnston followed Thomas to Los Angeles, where they studied at the Chouinard Art Institute. Thomas went to work at Disney's studio on Hyperion Avenue in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles in September 1934; Johnston joined the studio in January

1935 (making \$17 a week). He quickly rose through the artistic ranks, working as an assistant to Fred Moore, who supervised the animation of the Seven Dwarfs in *Snow White*.

Animation historians have pointed out that what mattered most to Johnston was not mere movement, but the emotions behind it. "What is the character thinking, and why does he feel

that way?" was the question he asked himself as he sat down to draw. "First thing you try to do is communicate what your character is feeling, what they're thinking," Johnston once noted. "If you're trying to make a point that would educate people, why, you



Bambi



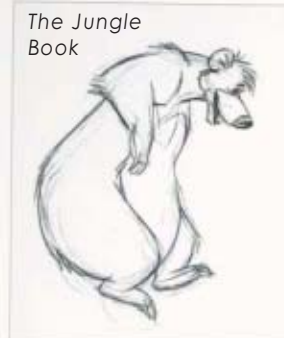
The Rescuers



Pinocchio

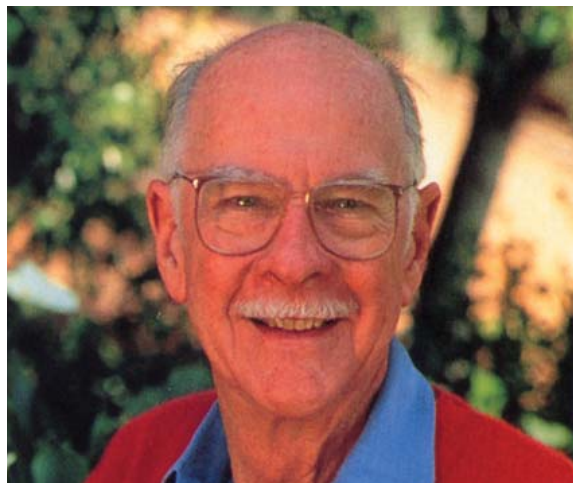


Mary Poppins



The Jungle Book





still have to do it in the most entertaining way."

Johnston had originally planned on becoming a magazine illustrator but fell in love with animation. "I wanted to paint pictures full of emotion that would make people want to read the stories," he said. "But I found that here [in animation] was something that was full of life and movement and action, and it showed all those feelings."

For one of his last assignments, Johnston animated Rufus, the kindly old cat who comforts Penny at the orphanage in *The Rescuers* (1977). Many animators believe Rufus was a partial self-caricature, as Johnston wore a similar moustache and glasses. During production on *Rescuers*, Johnston helped to train a new generation of animators at the Disney Studio.

After Johnston and Thomas retired in 1978, they lectured at schools and film festivals in the United States and Europe and co-authored the books *Bambi: the Story and the Film*, *Too Funny for Words*, *The Disney Villains* and their hugely popular *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life*, one of the most-read primers on the art form. They were also the subjects of the 1995 documentary *Frank and Ollie*, produced by Thomas' son Ted and daughter-in-law Kuniko Okubo.

In addition to awards from numerous animation festivals and organizations, the pair was honored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 2003. He was awarded the National Medal of Arts in Nov. 2005 by President Bush.

Johnston's wife of 63 years, the former Marie Worthey, passed away in 2005; he is survived by his two sons: Ken Johnston and his wife Carolyn; Rick Johnston and his wife Teya. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations be made to CalArts (calarts.com), the World Wildlife Fund (worldwildlife.org), or the National Resources Defense Council (nrdc.org). The Disney Studio is planning a life celebration.

—by Charles Solomon with additional quotes from Disney Studio's press release, the *Los Angeles Times* and Associated Press.

Disney/Pixar CCO and Oscar-winning director John Lasseter:

"Aside from being one of the greatest animators of all time, he and Frank [Thomas] were so incredibly giving and spent so much time creating the bible of animation *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* which has had such a huge impact on so many animators over the years."

Disney animator Andreas Deja on Johnston's work in *Bambi*:

"On the meadow, Bambi sees the Great Prince and gives him this big smile. The Great Prince passes by, very serious and stern, and very slowly Bambi's expression changes: he drops his ears slightly and looks a little scared. It's a scene that's so subtle, you think it couldn't be done in animation; when you want to show a change, you have to make it graphically clear and Bambi is undergoing such a subtle mood shift. But Ollie handled it with such tact and sensitivity."

Disney animator Glen Keane on Johnston's magic:

"In Ollie's scenes, all the changes of emotion took place through subtle expressions of the character's eyes and the mouth and hands. Ollie's drawings looked as if his pencil had just kissed the paper to coax the characters out. Ollie really felt with his characters. His animation wasn't an intellectual thing; it came from something inside of him. Ollie was a great mentor: He would give me something to do that was beyond me, then make sure that I had everything I needed to do it. He knew that as a student, you had to have little successes along the way if you were ever going to make it. I really appreciate the patience that he showed."

Two-time Oscar-winning director Brad Bird on Johnston's legacy:

"I met Ollie for the first time when I was 11, and I think he expected me to lose interest in animation. He was happily surprised when I showed up several years later with a film, and we stayed in contact from then on. He affected a lot of people who work in animation now, myself included, helping and inspiring them, taking time out of his day to talk to them about their own films. The body of work he left behind includes many of the most indelible moments in animation ever put on the screen. His impact as an artist, entertainer and teacher will continue into the foreseeable future. In one way, his passing marks the end of an era, but in many other ways that era will never end."

Oscar-winning animator and animation historian John Canemaker:

"Ollie's death truly marks the end of the 'Golden Age' of hand-drawn Disney character animation that blossomed in the 1930s. He was a great and nuanced animator who could handle sentiment and comedy with equal aplomb, as well as a sweet and generous mentor to many."

Early Summer Spins

Anime-inspired epic adventures and '80s Hanna-Barbera offerings arrive on DVD this month.

by Mercedes Milligan

Avatar—The Last Airbender, Book 3: Fire, Vol. 3 [Paramount, \$16.99]

In this latest installment of what M. Night Shyamalan has described as "the coolest mythology [he's] ever seen," airbender Aang and his friend are in the midst of a full-on invasion. Prepared to face his destiny after training hard in the four Bending arts, Aang goes in search of the Fire Lord, Ozai. But several unexpected twists throw a wrench in the works. He and his friends Katara, Sokka and Toph will have to rely on the help of former foes to overcome these new obstacles and realize their master plan.

One of the most beautiful and well-written series to hit the small screen, *Avatar* should be a staple in any animation fan's library. The series weaves elements of Eastern philosophy, martial arts, mysticism,

history and religion into an engrossing new mythological world that'll keep you holding your breath until the climactic conclusion.

[Release date: May 6]

The Richie Rich/Scooby-Doo Show: Complete Series, Vol. 1 [Turner, \$26.98]

Here's an interesting tidbit: *The Richie Rich/Scooby-Doo Show* was the only Hanna-Barbera package series that gave their canine superstar second billing—can you say "spoiled," Richie? Well, we can't play favorites, but we can tell you that this two-disc set will kick off the Complete Series releases with the first seven episodes.

Running on ABC from 1980 to 1982, *RR/S-D* will certainly find a home in



the hands of 80s nostalgia enthusiasts and a lot of 30 something with fond memories of these charming adventures.

The *Richie* segments were built on the Harvey Comics series, with cartoon *Richie* appearing a bit older and his canine companion *Dollar* taking on more human characteristics. The *Scooby-Doo* bits don't involve any of the *Mystery Machine* gang, focusing instead on the *Shaggy/Scooby/Scrappy* trifecta for a maximum funny-voice factor.

[Release date: May 20]

Ôban Star-Racers, Vol. 2: The Ôban Cycle [Shout Factory, \$19.99]

Following the release of *Vol. 1: The Alwas Cycle* in April, this second two-disc set contains the final 13 episodes of the mixed-media epic. The uncut *Alwas Cycle* introduced us to the futuristic Earth of 2082, a time when after a 10,000 year hiatus the Great Race of the planet Ôban is set to take place again. An Earthan team has been invited to participate in their spectacular *Whizzing Arrow* star-racer and compete for the ultimate prize: the winner of the race can wish for anything they desire. The first competition takes place on the planet *Alwas*, and when the team's top pilot steps down the fate of the *Arrow* and Earth itself are placed into



the hands of 15-year-old Molly.

In *Ôban Cycle*, Molly and her crew have qualified (along with the evil *Crog Imperium*) for the final Great Race, and they must give it their all so they can win the Ultimate Prize and use its power to save Earth and reunite Molly's family.

Both sets are well worth picking up, not only for the prize-winning 2D/3D animation but for the groovy extras: *Alwas* contains an interview with creator *Savin Yeatman-Eiffel* and part one of the "making of" docu, as well as character profiles, art and trailers; *Ôban* boasts part two of the docu, more characters and concepts and the original *MIPCOM* presentation (so all you aspiring toonsters can see how it's done).

[Release date: May 20]

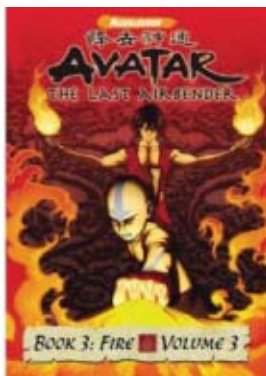
Pokémon—The Rise of Darkrai [VIZ, \$19.98]

Half the review could be taken up just by writing out the full Japanese title of this newest *Pokémon* movie (number 10!), which in anime tends to be a good indicator of how intricate the plot will be.

In this installment, our hero *Ash Ketchum* and his gang travel to *Alamos Town* on their way to the next big *Pokémon* contest. There they meet a girl named *Alice* who takes them on a tour of the town. When they get to the fore-shadowy *Space-Time Tower*, a mysterious, legendary *Pokémon* named *Darkrai* appears. Just as he does, fellow "legendaries" *Dialga* and *Palkia* start an epic battle, creating a rift in space and time (see?) that traps *Alamos* and its denizens in an ominous fog. *Ash* and his pals will have to unravel this mess made by three super-powerful *Pokés* and liberate the people of *Alamos Town*.

Sheesh ... And they say kids these days have short attention spans.

[Release date: May 27] ■



The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the Latest Anime DVD Releases

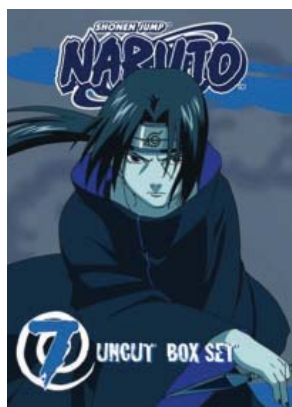
by Charles Solomon



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Could Naruto Uzumaki, the knuckle-headed ninja-in-training, be growing up? *Naruto* ranks among the most popular anime properties of all time, both the animated series and the manga, but the title character has never been a model citizen. No one believes the prankster when he proclaims that one day he will become *Hokage* (the most powerful ninja and therefore head of the Hidden Leaf Village). But none of the villagers realize how much power the rambunctious kid derives from the Nine-Tailed Fox Demon imprisoned within his body. The formidable rebel ninjas Itachi and Kisame covet that power. Jiraiya, the Sage of Toad-Mountain, takes Naruto away from the village to protect him and to further his training, although the ostensible reason for the trip is to find the redoubtable Lady Tsunade, who has been chosen to be the next *Hokage*. Naruto's behavior still won't win any gold stars: He overeats, yells and calls Jiraiya "Pervy Sage" (a title the lecherous, hard-drinking arch-ninja certainly merits). But he works at mastering the powerful new *jutsu* (magical ninja technique) Jiraiya shows him with a single-minded discipline he's never displayed before.

When he defeated Gaara, the homicidal opponent who fought with clouds of enchanted sand, Naruto said he had to grow strong to protect his friends and the Hidden Leaf Village. That's clearly his destiny. But this new-found resolve doesn't prevent this set from delivering the mixture of broad comedy, intense training, magical *jutsu* and unexpected adventures that *Naruto* fans expect. The Special Edition



comes with a collectible figure of the summoning creature, Gamakichi the Toad.

XXXHOLiC (2006) continues the adventures of Yuko, the Dimensional Witch in *Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle*. Put-upon high school nerd Kimihiko Watanuki can see evil spirits. When a weirdly amorphous one

pursues him, he stumbles into the shop of Yuko, who will grant any wish—for a price. Through a mixture of trickery, pressure and bargaining, Yuko persuades Watanuki to work for her. His after-school duties include running errands, fetching endless bottles of saké and cooking elaborate meals. He fusses on his own time. Yuko also recruits cheery Himawari, the girl of Watanuki's dreams, and stoic Doumeki, the boy of his nightmares. These ill-assorted characters undertake supernatural adventures at Yuko's behest. Rounding out the cast is a charcoal gray version of Mokona, the squeaky, obnoxiously cute mascot from *Tsubasa*. The artists of the four-woman collective CLAMP give *XXXHOLiC* a sensual, vaguely decadent



look, reminiscent of Symbolist painting. The related feature *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been released in a package with *Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle: The Movie: The Princess in the Birdcage*.

The sixth broad-

cast season of *Ranma 1/2* ranks among the silliest installments in a series famed for its take-no-prisoners silliness. Furink-en High's resident windbag Kuno suffers an attack of amnesia after a watermelon gets stuck on his head. Ranma fights Sotatsu with giant brushes and ink sticks in a Martial Arts Calligraphy match. As the master of this recherché discipline, Sotatsu initially refused Ranma's challenges because his handwriting was so sloppy. At a small carnival, a horribly cute drawing of a panda comes to life from a scroll and falls for Ranma: Imagine *Hello Kitty* in an amorous mood.

Like *The Simpsons*, *Ranma 1/2* depicts the characters who love each other and drive each other crazy. Director Junji Nishimura allows the sentiment to come through in a Christmas episode, when Ranma buys Akane gifts she actually wants. Ranma, Akane

and Ryoga prevent Furinken from freezing over when they treat a Snow-Woman (*Yuki-onna*) with genuine kindness. These gentler moments notwithstanding, most of the gender-bending misadventures are predicated on the broadest slapstick comedy. When the telepathic Satori visits the Tendo-Saotomi domicile, he screams, "The people in this house are weird!" Which sums up *Ranma 1/2*. Only 1 1/2 inches thick, this slim pack set is a boon for people whose shelves are filling up. ■



Naruto Uncut Box Set 7
(VIZ: \$49.98, three discs)

Ranma 1/2 Season Six:

Random Rhapsody
(VIZ: \$49.98, five discs)

XXXHOLiC: First Collection
(FUNimation: \$29.98)

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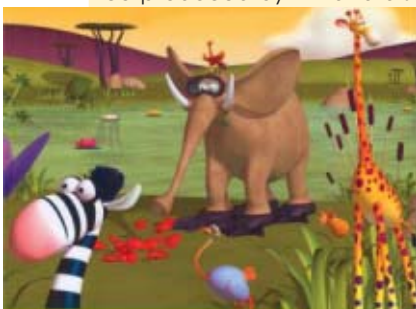
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Fresh Market Wrap: MIPTV 2008

We saw a lot of interesting new animated projects in various stages of development at last month's well-attended MIPTV market in Cannes. Toon producers expressed high hopes for the future promise of multi-platform riches—but we've come to expect those same lines from new media players in the past few years. In any case, here are only a few of the things that grabbed our attention this year:

SILLY TIMES IN THE SAVANNAH

If you like your animated animals goofy, surreal and big-hearted, then you'll be happy to meet the cast of **Gazoon**, a new CG-animated series produced by France's **Sparkling Animation Studios**, co-produced by TF1 and distributed by Dublin's **Monster! Distributes**.



Company topper Andrew Fitzpatrick tells us that the show is one of the more popular titles in his animation catalog this year. The 30x3.5 package lends itself perfectly to interstitial and multiplatform use. Something tells us you'll never look at the majestic animals of the African Savannah the same way after watching this show.

TOON STYLES OF THE RICH AND MISERABLE

In January, the viewers of **TELETOON**'s *Detour* block of adult animation got a taste of a hilarious series called **Punch!**, which combines "out there" cut-out animation with on-target spoofs of today's celebrities and their insane world. Created by the zany bunch at Montreal-based **Kiwi Animation** (under the guidance of director/producer Yves St-Gelais), the high-def half-hour show follows a team of show biz "journalists" as they pump out wacky reports to please the big boss and drive magazine sales! From Tom Cruise, Madonna and Britney Spears to Queen Elizabeth, Donald Trump and Oprah, nobody is safe from the biting humor and clever wit of this irreverent series. We hope the rest of the world gets to enjoy this fast and funny commentary on our topsy turvy pop-culture universe.



HANG ON TO YOUR CHAPEAU

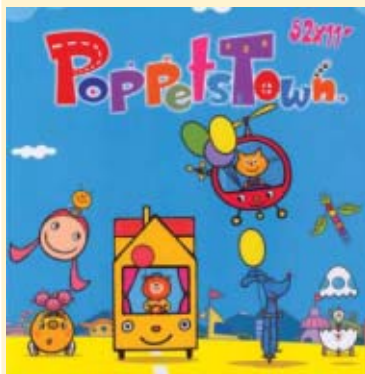
French toon house **Les Films de la Perrine** has high hopes for a new sci-fi adventure series set in the year 2213.

Anatone: The Children of Okura is an unusual undertaking as it's something of a serial and its plot takes its young protagonists all over the world—from Paris and Capri to Istanbul and Shanghai. Based on an original idea and graphic concepts by Mark Maggiori and directed by Marc Boreal, the 26x26 package begins as Earth enters a new Ice Age after surviving a terrible nuclear accident. The show's hero, Anatone, realizes that he has the power to become invisible one day, and decides to use his power to defeat the great dictator Clunk. Anatone, his best friend Nikita and his younger sister Ariane begin a global search, which eventually takes them to the mythical city of Okura. The show's well-plotted episodes and its beautiful designs have already made fans out of us. We'll gladly tag along on this international excursion.



A REAL PARTY TOWN

Take one look at the one-sheet for **Decode Entertainment**'s new preschool show **Poppets Town**, and you'll find it hard not to fall for the great character design and the splashy colors. The



52x11 series has this as its central premise: "Life's a party in Poppets Town," and who can argue with that sentiment? We also like this tag line a lot: "Sometimes a Poppet on the go just doesn't

know what to do next! That's where Scooter and his best friends Patty and Bobby come in!" Sometimes, we all wish we could call on Scooter's Gang to fix our lives' little problems. Oh, and they all get extra points for having cool names such as the Uki-Uki Brothers, Cocori, Cozy—and of course, Scooter!

TALE FROM THE DARK-ISH SIDE

You can always count on Kevin Gillis and his team at **Breakthrough Animation** to introduce a cool new show at every market. This time around, they were spreading the word on **Creepsville**, an intriguing older-skewing title that centers on three young heroes who wake up one day to find their world changed. In this parallel universe, nothing is quite as it seems and hidden dangers and pathways lead to darker places than you remembered. The 26x30 series reminds us of Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Or as a friend pointed out, it's a mix of *Lost* and *Carnival* for the teenage set. We also have to mention that the show's awesome teaser was created by none other than Aron Rhys Evans and Owen Stickler's Dinamo studio in Cardiff. Good and creepy, indeed.



YO HO HO & A BOTTLE OF CARROT JUICE

*Listen up, you rebel kids
You outlaws and black-hearted
I'll tell you all a rabbit's tale
Of how this quest got started.*

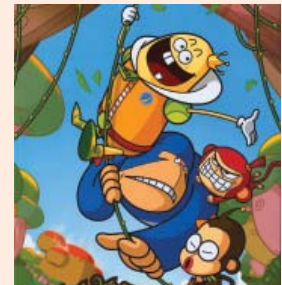
That's the catchy musical intro to **Jolly Rabbit**, the wonderful new offering from Larry Schwarz and his gifted team at New York-based studio **Animation Collective** (Kappa Mikey, Ellen's Acres, Three Delivery) The 52x11 Flash-



animated series centers on a spunky rabbit who sets sail aboard a pirate ship, along with a punk-rocking trio of buddies, in search of the evil Captain Squid who stole his leg. Jack Sparrow, you'd better watch out for this one. The premise of the toon is awesome, the design is top-notch, and Jolly Rabbit's song—well, it's hard to keep the sea shanty out of your head once you hear it even once.

SLIPPERY WHEN WET

Tell us if you've heard this one before! An immature "Banana Prince" from another planet lands on Shake Island, which is inhabited by monkeys who have been praying for the second coming of a "Super-Banana" to save them from an erupting volcano! Huh? Yes, that's the premise of **Banana Shake**, the new Flash-animated series from those wild and crazy guys and gals at Korea's **Sieundesign Co.** Frankly, we got a secret kick out of this 11x52 series aimed at kids (eight to 12). After all, how can you not love an immature alien banana prince?



THE CAVEMAN COMETH

Our pal Rita Street over at **Radar Cartoons** tell us that **Frederator Studios** has picked up **Boneheads**, a great new show from Japan's **Polygon Pictures** to be part of its Random! Cartoons shorts package. This unique-looking CG-animated project is created by Hiroshi Chida, a talented director at Polygon. It's described as "a cartoon about a smarter-than-average caveman and his spastic buddy who make daily attempts to beat the food chain." Hmm, maybe they can even get Ringo Starr to do the caveman's voice!



SENSORY OVERDRIVE

Here's what we know about **Daewon Media** and **Cookie Jar's** hot new CG-animated series **Noonbory and the Super7**. (1) The 11x52 series is set in a magical land called Toobaloo. (2) Each episode follows the adventures of our main hero, Noonbory, and his seven pals, each of whom come with a special super sense. (3) They all have preschool-friendly names like Pongdybory, Totobory and Cozybory. (4) The show's villains are not really scary—in fact, they're goofballs. (5) There's a character named Luky, who isn't a Super Bory, yet, but he has a good sense of nonsense, which keeps everyone laughing! Yup, it sure sounds like we have a perfect recipe for a college cult show in the tradition of *The Smurfs* and *The Teletubbies*. Let's just not let the Moral Majority conservative groups know about this one, yet!



Rising Stars of Animation and VFX: Class of 2008

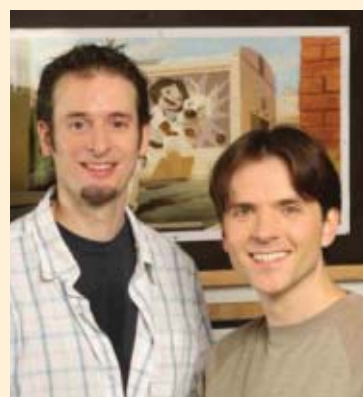
We could devote a whole issue to all the talented men and women who are raising the bar in the animation and visual effects landscape with their online shorts, TV series and full-scale feature projects. It wasn't easy to narrow down the field to only 15 individuals whose star was on the rise these days, but once we made our list, it was a kick to hear what they all had to say about their lives and times. We should all keep a close eye on this eclectic group as they're bound to keep surprising us with the artistic things they'll pull out of their bags of tricks.

Chris Williams and Byron Howard Co-Directors, Disney's *Bolt*

The early buzz on Disney's CG-animated holiday release *Bolt* is so good that toon lovers are already salivating—and it's only May. The feature's two brave first-time directors Chris Williams and Byron Howard are no strangers to the Mouse House. Howard was an in-between artist on *Pocahontas*, animator on *Mulan* and supervising animator for *John Henry*, *Lilo & Stitch*, *Brother Bear* and *Chicken Little*, while Williams worked in the story department for *Mulan* and *The Emperor's New Groove*. But the new movie about a lost pampered Hollywood dog star who has to find his way back home (with the aid of Mr. Mittens the cat and Rhino the hamster) is what will undoubtedly put Williams and Howard on the map in a huge way.

Williams, a Sheridan college graduate, first got into Disney as the result of an internship program at the Florida studio, followed by a story training program in Burbank. Howard first started as a Disney tour guide in Florida in 1991 which also led to an internship at the studio. He remembers how thrilled he was when he wrote to the folks at Disney out of the blue, and got a letter back from none other than the late Frank Thomas in which he offered him some advice on getting in to the business. "I remember the impact *Roger Rabbit* had on me, and then Disney's *The Little Mermaid* came out in '89," he recalls. "That really sealed the deal for me. Here was a heroine that was really alive." His natural talents as an artist soon led him to key roles on projects such as *John Henry*, *Lilo & Stitch*, *Brother Bear* and *Chicken Little*.

Williams, who was the first person tapped to take over the movie from the project's original helmer, Chris Sanders (*Lilo & Stitch*), says he had to learn as he went along through every stage of the production. "You have to learn fast, adjust and make decisions quickly," he shares. "The nice thing was that a great crew had already been assembled for the movie. All the leads are so good that I can lean on them for advice. With John [Lasseter] at the studio, it's a new era for us here. We all work very hard and are rallying around this movie. The team really believes in this resurgence of animation at Disney."



Chris Williams and Byron Howard



Although Howard and Williams share duties on many different aspects of the project, they both have clear areas of expertise. Howard leads on animation and character design, while Williams oversees story, layout, editorial and recording. And it's a good thing that the duo seems to have nothing but high praise for each other's talents and positive character traits.

"I tell young students of animation to just get out and create life experiences that you can put into the story," says Williams, who was hugely influenced by Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts* comic strip. "I think the more you open yourself to ideas, books, movies and interesting life experiences, the better you'll become at storytelling, especially now that Pixar has raised the bar so high in our field. You'd better be passionate and really care about the work that you do!"

Howard echoes his partner's sentiments. "The cooperative spirit that existed in the story room with Chris is carried out through all the later stages of *Bolt*. We have animators who are baring their souls on the screen, who may have their work torn apart later. The best people are the ones who can take notes and are open to good suggestions in an open forum!"

—Ramin Zahed

Thurop Van Orman, Creator, *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack*

The quest for adventure has always played a big part in Thurop Van Orman's life, who counts *He-Man* and *The Smurfs* as two of his big childhood inspirations. "They would go out in the wilderness and have these magical things happen to them," says Van Orman, creator of *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack*, debuting in June on Cartoon Network. "I got kind of obsessed with that."



So obsessed was Van Orman, that at age 14 he left home to try living in the wilds of Shell Island off the coast of Panama City, Fla. Unfortunately, things didn't go as planned. "It was just this huge misadventure," he says. "I starved for three days—I felt I blew it."

But people's reactions when he told his tale proved that his perceived failure was anything but. "People don't want to hear that you set a goal and you accomplished your goal and it's as easy as that. They want to hear everything that goes wrong, they want to hear what happened instead."

And whether Van Orman knew it at the time, those experiences gave life to Flapjack, a boy who is raised by the whale Bubbie and is inspired to adventure by the tall tales of Captain K'nuckles. "The crazier the things that happened [to me], the more exciting it got because this was an adventure now," says Van Orman, who also provides the voice for his lead character. "And that's exactly Flapjack's personality in the show."

Van Orman had originally set out to create children's books. Illustration and design work lead to a job at a video game company that piqued his interest in animation and prompted him to enroll in CalArts' animation program. Wanting to work for Cartoon Network, he snagged an internship there and worked his way up while developing *Flapjack* as a series.

Set for 13 episodes, Van Orman says he wants to avoid restricting where the show can go. "I've tried to keep from setting too many rules for the show or even establishing characters as hard rules," he says. "We're just kind of letting it happen."

—Tom McLean



Tomm Moore Creator and Director, *The Secret of Kells*

Tomm Moore, the director and creator of the beautiful, 2D animated feature *The Secret of Kells* (a.k.a. *Brendan—The Secret of Kells*) remembers visiting Don Bluth's studio in Ireland along with his colleague, art director Ross Stewart when they were only 14. "We realized how difficult and time consuming animation really was and both decided that we preferred comics!" But luckily, after brushing up on his drawing skills at Senior College Ballyfermot in Dublin, Moore got the old animation bug back again.

This fall, he will finally see the fruits of his labor hit silver screens around the world. One of the most anticipated European animated movies of the year, *The Secret of Kells* has already generated early buzz for its meticulously crafted art and stunning 2D animation. It was over seven years ago when Moore first joined forces with Irish animation studio Cartoon Saloon's Paul Young to create a promo trailer which caught the attention of respected French producer Didier Brunner (*The Triplets of Belleville*). "I've been working on this project in one form or another for nearly 10 years now," says the talented 31-year-old Irishman.

A co-production between Cartoon Saloon (Ireland), Les Armateurs (France) and Vivifilm (Belgium), *The Secret of Kells* cost almost 6 million euros to make, and you can almost see every cent up on the screen. Moore says he's thrilled that the project's original concept art made it to the film quite faithfully. "We wanted to bring a unique Irish design to classical animation. My co-director, Nora Twomey, and I were inspired by ancient Celtic art and illuminated manuscripts, including, of course, *The Book of Kells*," he notes. "Animation and art-wise, we were inspired by movies like *The Thief and the Cobbler*, *Hungarian Folk Tales* and Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and *Mulan*."

Moore, who cites Richard Williams, Genndy Tartakovsky, Maurice Noble, Brad Bird, Mary Blair and Hayao Miyazaki as his animation heroes, has a few words of advice for others who want to follow in his footsteps: "Keep it as simple as possible production-wise and be prepared for a loooooong haul."

—Ramin Zahed



Aharon Bourland Supervising Technical Director, Tippett Studio

Creative solutions come easily to Aharon Bourland—a skill that comes in handy when the Tippett Studio supervising technical director is figuring out how to make effects work for films like *The Spiderwick Chronicles*.

"I really like the problem-solving stuff," says Bourland. "It's like coming to work and you never know what's going to happen."

Reworking production pipelines and writing shaders may not seem like the logical career choice for a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but Bourland sees an obvious connection between her fine art education and the pop art of making movies. "The formal training I received in the arts school was more about creative problem solving and being able to think your way through problems, which is probably more valuable than actually being formally, explicitly trained in a system," she says.

Bourland took her degree and began working as an assistant editor on commercials. That led to some work in title design and motion graphics that evolved into a desire to try visual effects.



The Spiderwick Chronicles

Bourland came in to Tippett as a TD, working on the compositing and animation side of things on *Hellboy*, *Constantine* and *Son of the Mask*. Those films gave her the chance to learn about lighting and rendering, and as she picked up technical skills she was soon writing shaders and working as lead TD on *Charlotte's Web* and *Spiderwick*.

Her largest project to date, Bourland says the challenge on *Spiderwick* was figuring out ways to refine the overall effects pipeline to accommodate the large number of complex CG characters the movie required.

She hopes to move up to vfx supervisor and to continue to do her own art. Some of her toy-like pieces can be found at her website, www.aharonbb.com.

Bourland is now working on marketing materials for the upcoming comedy *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*, in which she's creating 10 digital dogs in a swimming pool. "They always propose these preposterous things to me, and I sit down and figure out how to make it work," she says.

—Tom McLean

Richard Webber, Creator, *Purple and Brown*, Aardman Animations

It's been a great couple of years for Richard Webber, the talented animator at Aardman Animation. Not only was his inspired *Purple and Brown* series landed as an interstitial on Nickelodeon U.K. and the broadband video service TurboNick, he also directed several episodes of Aardman's award-winning *Shaun the Sheep* preschool show and worked on several acclaimed commercials. The 42-year-old Bristol native says he loves designing characters, writing *Purple and Brown* scripts and working with a wonderful creative crew at Aardman.

"The idea for *Purple and Brown* first came about following another idea I was working on about a flatulent acrobatic team which consisted of four plasticine characters," he says. "At the same time we were approached by a comedian who had his own TV show and wanted to incorporate some animated characters so I wrote a two-minute piece to fit his show and we shot a pilot and that's how *Purple and Brown* was born!"

As a young boy, Webber says he was always sculpting, drawing cartoons and making models. "Throughout school, various teachers told me that you can't make a career out of this!" he recalls. "After many uninspiring jobs, I thought, 'Sod it!' I applied for a place at Newport Film School, got it and fell in love with animation."

Jobs at local animation shops such as Cod Steaks, CMTB and Bolex Brothers led to a job on Aardman's *Robbie the Reindeer: Hooves of Fire* project.

Webber, who considers Ray Harryhausen, Chuck Jones and Jan Svankmajer some of his animation heroes, says he loves how you can achieve the thumbby look of plasticine animation in CG these days. "I think that both have their place depending on the project and don't see stop-frame being pushed out of the picture just yet. I hope not, anyway!" Not as long as he keeps delivering brilliant stuff for the world to admire.

—Ramin Zahed



Purple and Brown



Jeff Bandelin (a.k.a. Johnny Utah) Creator, [TANKMEN](http://TANKMEN.com), NewGrounds.com

Johnny Utah's (real name: Jeff Bandelin) irreverent, bawdy and bloody *Tank Men* can be viewed as commentary on the absurdity of war, but it's also a vehicle for off-color non sequiturs and dick jokes. The series of shorts has developed a following on NewGrounds.com, whose military tank logo inspired the animation. He was hired to update the logo after he entered an animation contest on the site.



Bandelin initially went to college for illustration and design, and took a one-semester animation class, which he says existed solely for the passion of one teacher. "While all the other departments were loaded up with computers, all we had to work with was two old pencil test machines and lots of paper," he recalls. "Unfortunately all my first animations are on a decaying VHS tape, but it was the most rewarding class I ever took."

After landing a job at animation house Camp Chaos, Bandelin became lead character designer for a short-lived animated cable show titled *VH1's ILL-ustrated*. When the series quickly met its demise, he was laid off with the rest of the staff and inquired about employment at NewGrounds. The rest, as he says, is history.

As an illustrator, Bandelin is inspired by the artists who work on video games published by Capcom. "Their characters have always been iconic in design and the way they're drawn and colored has always been bold and interesting to me." He says he'd like to make a movie or have his own TV series one day but knows how frustrating it can be to fight for creative control. In the meantime, he's contributing art assets for menus for the upcoming Xbox Live Arcade game *Castle Crashers*, being developed by his boss' side company, The Behemoth. "It's shaping up to be quite a beautiful 2D game and I'm happy to be a small part of it."

—Ryan Ball



SPECIAL FOCUS

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Todd Wilderman Co-director, Sony Pictures Animation's *Open Season 2*

Though still a young buck at the age of 34, Todd Wilderman is one of our older rising stars, but he says he's glad that he took the time to learn the ropes and build a career from the ground floor. The experience he has gained in the trenches has better prepared him for the challenges of collaborating with director Matthew O'Callaghan (*Curious George*) to see a major home video release through from development to completion.

While in school at CalArts, Wilderman landed an internship at Turner Animation before the Turner/Warner Bros. merger. The summer stint turned into a paying gig doing cleanup and in-betweening on the 1997 feature *Cats Don't Dance*. Eager to graduate to animation, he left the studio and joined Sony Pictures Imageworks and has been there for 12 years. His first assignment was working with director Rob Minkoff on *Stuart Little*. He also supervised animation for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, before taking on lead animator duties on *Stuart Little 2* and starting development of *Open Season*.

"I love the real early, front-end stuff like either coming up with the concept itself or working off of a really rough idea and trying to solidify it," Wilderman says. "Working up a story and defining who the characters are has been the most fun for me. I usually would then stay on a project as an animator throughout, but I kind of got burned out doing that all the time and moved out of animating and into development full time."

The opportunity to co-direct *Open Season 2* came as a welcomed surprise to this emerging talent, though the brisk pace of production has presented its challenges. Animation is almost complete and Sony is eyeing this winter for a domestic release.

"I'm really proud with how it's turning out," Wilderman remarks. "Overall, it doesn't feel like something made on a tight budget—it feels like a real feature film!"

Wilderman has spent several months drafting treatments and creating conceptual artwork for projects that haven't yet gone into production. He has also been pitching his own stories to Sony Animation brass, and hopes to helm one of them in the near future.

—Ryan Ball



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Ged Haney and Andreas Hykade, Co-creators, *The Bunjies*

They're the greatest rock band in the world, but they haven't done their homework. They're The Bunjies, and the big splash they made in their animation debut seems certain to continue as creators Ged Haney and Andreas Hykade of Germany's Studio Film Bilder develop the musical cartoon into a series.

Haney, who is English, and Hykade came up with The Bunjies casually, thinking up ideas for cartoons over wine on Saturday evenings. Both started out in other fields—Hykade in comics; Haney in graphic design and illustration—before drifting into animation. The duo worked together on commercials and music videos and shared a common interest in the punk and glam-rock music of the 1970s (think David Bowie, The Cramps and The Ramones!) before putting their minds to coming up with a new animated series.

"We thought we'd do something that we really like to do and probably something that teenagers would like and something that's got to do with music as well," says Hykade. The details came about organically, Haney says. "I said they should be rabbits and [Hykade] said OK. It wasn't an intellectual thing, it was stumbling toward the light."

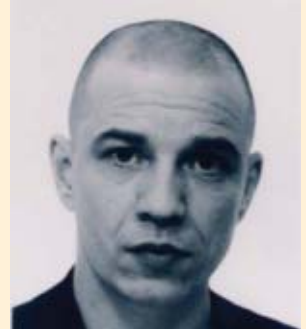
The duo exchanged passes at everything, with Haney focused slightly more on writing and directing, and Hykade on the designs. The group's three-minute debut generated plenty of interest in its debut at the Cartoon Forum market and has gone on to become a hit at festivals and online at www.bunjies.com. Talks are now under way for financial and broadcast partners, and the duo is taking its time writing scripts for 13 11-minute episodes that they expect will go into production within a year.

Haney says it's very important to him to keep the quality high and not to have the concept distorted by executives afraid of the character's distinctive lingo or the black-and-white segments. "I really don't want them saying, 'Hey, dude,' " says Haney, who believes quality wins out in the end. "People of all ages will watch really good, quality stuff."

—Tom McLean



Ged Haney



Andreas Hykade



Olivier Staphylas Character Animator, DreamWork's *Kung Fu Panda*

At 28, Olivier Staphylas is living a dream that took hold of him when he was 15 and saw *Toy Story* and became aware of various CG-animated short films from art schools in his native France and other parts of Europe. He ended up attending one of those institutions, Supinfocom in the south of France. Upon graduating in 2003, he was hired by visual effects company BUF in Paris but decided he really wanted to do cartoon animation. He enrolled in the three-year animation program at Gobelins, going straight to the third year curriculum and graduating at the top of his class. Representatives from DreamWorks saw his graduate film, *Le Building*, and hired him immediately to work as a character animator on *Kung Fu Panda*. "I was lucky to arrive right at the beginning of animation, so I managed to have time to work on many characters and different sequences," Staphylas tells us. "I loved it. It was an awesome experience to work on that movie as my first job."

At DreamWorks, Staphylas gets to work with some of his personal animation heroes, including James Baxter, Kristof Serrand and Rodolphe Guenoden. "I'm learning a lot from seeing them work," he says. "Apart from that, I try to be open to other media—museums, blogs and observation of surrounding people."

Staphylas was one of the first artists to get involved with DreamWorks Animation's 2010 release, *How to Train Your Dragon*, and is now busy at work animating the adaptation of Cressida Cowell's book. He plans to someday create his own animation studio, but until then he enjoys having a little time to unwind with music and French red wine.

Le Building was created with fellow Gobelins students Pierre Perifel, Marco Nguyen, Xavier Ramonède and Rémi Zaarour. You can watch the film and learn more about its creators at www.le-building.com.

—Ryan Ball



Walt Disney Animation Studios

CONGRATULATES

Their Rising Stars...

Chris Williams and
Byron Howard



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Heath Kenny Director, Alphanim's *Robotboy*

Once you've directed a music video for the ultra-cool animated band Gorillaz, the world is your oyster! Just ask Heath Kenny, the talented 31-year-old New Zealand native who joined forces with Passion Pictures to create the band's 2005 clip for "Dirty Harry"—a project which blended real-world African desert locations with CG and 2D animation. So we asked the Paris-based artist to let us in on one of the secrets of his success. "I think one of the biggest lessons I've learned is that it's all about creativity," he says. "There are a lot of people who can draw well, animate well or direct technically well. The really good ones are creative first! A bad idea, no matter how well it's executed, is still a bad idea!"

These days, Kenny is directing the second season of Alphanim's popular animated series *Robotboy*. "I'd done a storyboard on the first season and knew they guys who put it all together," recalls the 31-year-old helmer. "I had a meeting with Cartoon Network in London and Alphanim in Paris—then they gave me a shot! It was strange to move back into series work after doing commercials for so long in London, but it's been a very rewarding experience. I love the show's balance between comedy and action. I also love the innocence of *Robotboy*—it's a great contrast to the selfish ignorance of his foil, Gus."

Kenny says he grew up watching shows such as *Thunderbirds*, *Looney Tunes* shorts and "the odd Asterix movie" in a small town near Wellington. "The movie I remember most is *Akira*—that just blew me away," he says. "I actually didn't discover Disney films until I was 18!"

While studying animation in New Zealand at Freelance Animation School, which was founded by ex-Disney feature animator John Ewing, he met director Brent Chambers who was incredibly supportive of his desire to animate and offered him jobs doing layout, storyboarding and animation on series and commercials.

Robotboy's inherent optimism and can-do attitude has obviously rubbed off on Kenny. "It's an incredible time to be working in animation today," he notes. "The challenge, as always, is to be sincerely creative and bring something personal to the medium. I believe this is just the beginning and animation is an art form that will continue to grow in stature as more and more artists find the courage and the forum to bring their ideas to life."

—Ramin Zahed

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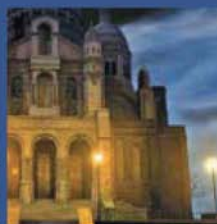


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From All Your Friends at
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Rising Stars

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Megan Laughton Supervising Producer, Chorion Silver Lining's *Olivia*

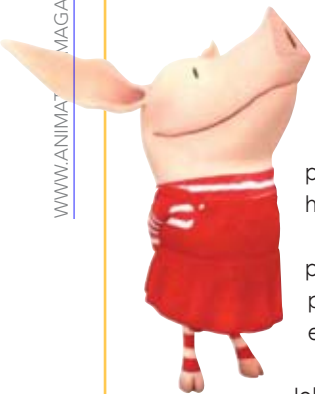
Growing up with only three TV channels with patchy reception on the third can help your future in animation, kids. Just ask Megan Laughton, who remembers watching *Looney Tunes* reruns on TV as a girl growing up in Toronto. "I'm especially fond of the 'Man of a Thousand Voices,' Mel Blanc," she notes. "Between *The Flintstones* and *Looney Tunes*, this man made me laugh almost every day of my childhood!"

Laughton, the sharp supervising producer on Chorion Silver Lining's upcoming new CG-animated series *Olivia*, studied English and history at the University of Toronto and soon found herself hired as a P.A. to Clive Smith, one of the three original founders of Canuck toon studio Nelvana. "At the time, animators, writers, fine artists, designers, musicians, voice directors and producers all worked under the same roof and buzzed along at a production pace," she recalls. "I loved it!" Seven years ago, she moved to New York and hooked up with Diana Manson and Amory Millard, founders of Silver Lining.

Laughton says she's thrilled to be able to work with *Olivia* creator Ian Falconer to bring the beloved girl/pig from page to CG life. "To take this amazing character from page to screen and to a wider audience is an incredible opportunity," she adds. "Moreover being able to do that with Ian Falconer, my creative colleagues at Chorion and our equally passionate production partners at Brown Bag Films—well, it just doesn't get any better than that!"

When asked about her animation heroes, Laughton mentions figures such as Disney, Chuck Jones, Firtz Freleng, John Lasseter, Matt Groening, Brad Bird and Nick Park. But she says she also has a soft spot for Bugs Bunny. "I love his cool confidence, clever wit and irreverent, rebellious style—and he's beautiful to watch on screen." So what kind of brilliant words of advice does she have for other up-and-comers in the field? "Enjoy what you do or at least know why you're doing it, even if it's an entry-level position. When you do, it's a lot easier to revise a design for the umpteenth time, cope with carpal tunnel, stay late to meet a Fed Ex deadline or repeatedly explain to others how to access your FTP site!" ■

—Ramin Zahed



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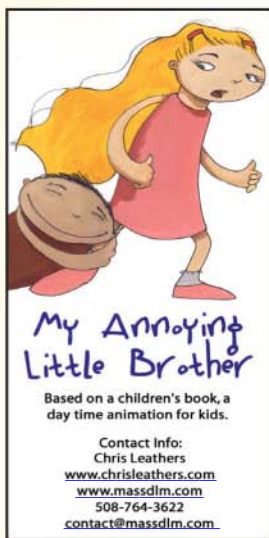
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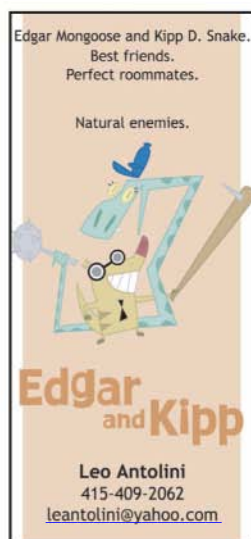
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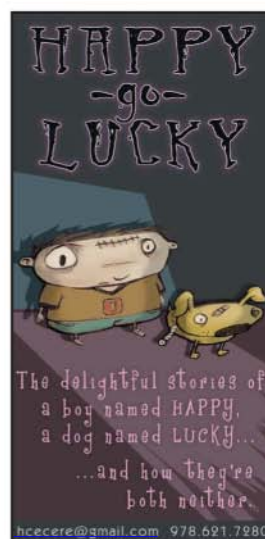
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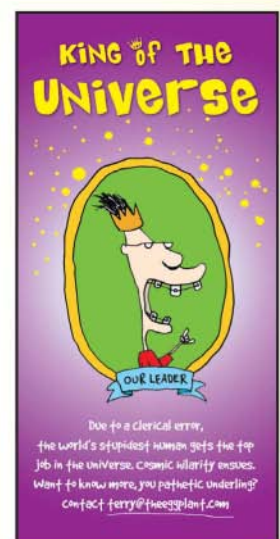
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Anime Maxes Out

How the media savants at Sony are taking the world by storm with ANIMAX. *by Mercedes Milligan*

Over the last decade or so, the world of Western animation has been rocked by the fandom supported licensing bonanza that is Japanese anime. Nowadays Pikachu is a household name, TV has seen a boon of "anime-inspired" heroes and reinventions of classic brands (*Teen Titans*, *Totally Spies*), and the American box office has a veritable conga line of anime-based features coming its way (*Speed Racer*, *Dragonball*). No one is surfing this tidal craze like ANIMAX: An international broadcasting behemoth of anime content for TV, mobile and the web.

Launched as a satellite channel in Japan in 1998, ANIMAX quickly gained the reputation of being the destination for the coolest anime content available. The network is now broadcasting megahits like *Dragon Ball Z*, *BLOOD+* and *R.O.D. the TV* to almost 50 countries, in over 44 million households and in 14 languages—and there's plenty of room for expansion. "There are more and more anime shifting toward teens and young adults, as youth and adults these days grew up with anime, and kiddie content does not satisfy them anymore," says Marie Jacobson, Sony Pictures Television International's exec VP of programming and production. "We are the first—a pioneer!—in rolling out an anime-based youth channel around the world. Anime is already a mainstream culture among youths, and ANIMAX is getting huge traction from this group. In 2008, ANIMAX will definitely be seen in even more countries; either in the form of linear TV channels or as a mobile service."

What mobile service? Oh, only one of the greatest success stories of mobile content to date, carried in six countries (with another seven anticipated in the coming months) on nine different carriers. When asked what the response to the pocket-sized screen channels

launched in '07 has been, Jacobson offered some impressive tidbits: "In Australia, one carrier's revenues from the channel exceeded their annual projection in just two months. In Canada, the operator was surprised to discover more repeat viewing on ANIMAX than on any of their other mobile TV channels ... In Hong Kong, the carriers have been asking us to add more series since the day we went live, even with over 200 episodes of seven series available at launch!"

As for how all this killer content is supported, Jacobson tells us that—like anything else in an international business—it varies. ANIMAX is offered in monthly channel bundles (usually \$7-\$15 per month), as a daily or weekly subscription and even on demand—complete with DVR functionality for today's Tivo-spoiled viewer. "Seriously, there are almost as many business models as there are wireless operators carrying the channel," she quips. "Ultimately, we see mobile TV functioning much like cable and satellite channels do, with a dual revenue stream of subscriber fees and advertising income."

The next clear step for ANIMAX (now that they seem to *literally* be taking over the world), of course, is to create some awesome new anime of their own, and they're doing it in an excitingly fresh way. Taking a cue from web 2.0 fever, ANIMAX is currently in production on a new series based on a pilot script by an amateur anime fan. The project, *EVE* by Carmelo San Juan Juinio, was selected as the first winner of the ANIMAX Awards—a competition where fans sent in original scripts for a 30-minute anime pilot. *EVE* (a.k.a. *Laminated Woman*) was one of over 3,000



Marie Jacobson



multi-regional entries competing for a shot at an Animax-produced and animated cable OVA premiere, truly any otaku's greatest dream (besides hooking up with Rei Ayana-mi).

Juinio should certainly be proud that the Awards' panel of experts including animation players Hideo Katsumata and Tomonori Ochikoshi (A-1 Pictures), Masao Takiyama (ANIMAX Japan), Lingun Sung (Peach Blossom) and Nickson Fong (Egg Story) felt that his script outshone them all. His concept—a futuristic world where prisoners are encased in laminated suits that control their actions—will also become a 13x2 webisode package, online games, digital comic book and possibly mobile manga (manga publisher Takashi Watanabe



and commercial tools they need to play with, create and share their own anime-inspired genius and use ANIMAX as their platform for creative expression," says Jacobson. There are also plans to adopt current Sony film and videogame properties for future TV and mobile series. But as Jacobson remains mum on plans to

of Kadokawa Shoten and artist Hirohiko Araki were also on the panel).

Because of the popularity of the contest, ANIMAX hopes to expand this fan-creation concept. "Our next step in the fan-generated anime space is to provide our viewers with video, music

expand in the U.S., hopefully we won't have to move to Canada to enjoy them! ■

Find out more about ANIMAX TV and ANIMAX Mobile at www.animaxtv.com.

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Tech Reviews

by Todd Sheridan Perry



Side Effects' Houdini 9

Houdini has a well-established place in the world of visual effects and has long been accepted as the leader when it comes to particles, dynamics and cloth simulation. It's an extremely powerful program setup which works like a node-based compositing system, but the nodes perform complex calculations in the 3D world. This methodology makes the tool idea for creating interactive animations because the artist can change parameters upstream in the scene, and the changes will then propagate downstream to the final output. The output can be any number of formats; from an image rendered out in Houdini's Mantra render engine, to a RIB file to be rendered in RenderMan, to a particle system to be exported to another 3D program—really the options are wide and varied. The most recent output added in version 9 is an FBX exporter which has become the industry standard for migrating scenes from platform to platform. Current customers are constantly getting new versions of the software as Side Effects develops new features, refines older ones or fixes issues. Houdini is also available in four flavors: Master, Escape, Apprentice and Apprentice HD.

The Master edition is the full, no-holds-barred version of Houdini. It takes everything that it has developed over the past decade and puts it into the hands of the user. Modeling, animation, skinning, lighting, rendering and (most importantly) particles, fluid and dynamics are all bunched into a package that sports a new, more artist-friendly interface. This interface, by the way, has been sorely needed. Because Houdini was birthed during the reign of SGIs, the interface was not pleasing. And, despite *Jurassic Park's* insistence that a 14-year-old girl who knows Unix could navigate through the security system where no expenses were spared, anyone who actually used programs in Unix/Irix knows that the user interface was lousy for most programs. Houdini held onto its legacy interface for a long time, and it's good to see it move on.

The Escape edition is the Master edition without Particles and Dynamics (which is

kind of pointless in my book). But I could see that maybe you throw the Escape version to modelers and animators, and give Master to the fx animators.

The Apprentice edition is a free download and has everything that Master has, but the renders are watermarked and have a resolution restriction on renders which caps at 720 x 576. You are also unable to export to third-party renderers, like RenderMan or Air, but if you are downloading the Apprentice edition, you don't really have business rendering in those anyway.



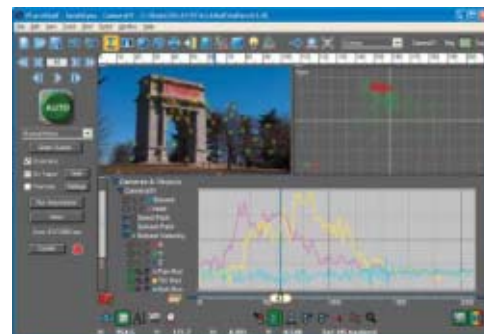
Finally, the Apprentice HD edition is available for a C Note, doesn't have a watermark, and can render up to HD resolution. If you are planning on getting your toes wet in Houdini, you might as well spring for the HD version and push off buying your daily Starbucks for a month. It's well worth the investment, you get total support from the company as well as user forums, and as long as you aren't selling your services, Side Effects backs you up completely. After all, Houdini artists are difficult to find and are in high demand these days! The fewer hurdles there are to learn the trade, the more artists there will be in the pool.

Website: www.sidefx.com

Price: Houdini Escape: \$1,995; Houdini Master: \$7,995; Houdini Batch: \$1,495

Andersonn Technologies' SynthEyes

Last month, Andersonn Technologies released the newest version of its robust camera and vfx object tracker SynthEyes in time for the popular NAB confab in Vegas. This handy tool is used by plenty of companies across the board from the big boys like Industrial Light & Magic and Digital Domain down to the



freelance artist just working out of his garage. I have used it on and off since it came around and have found it to be just as powerful, if not more than other software 10 to 20 times its price. Just last year, moviegoers saw splashy uses of the software in blockbusters such as *The Golden Compass*, *There Will Be Blood* and *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*.

The newest version of SynthEyes benefits mainly from code changes under the hood that make it more accurate and faster, as well as optimizations to utilize RAM more effectively for playback.

The features in SynthEyes are honestly too many to pinpoint and list in this brief space. Between camera tracking, object tracking, mesh-assisted tracking, multi-camera tracking, combination of nodal and translation tracking, the list could go on and on. In fact, a number of the release's features aren't even present in its more expensive cousins—like calculating a depth pass from live-action footage for integrating CG into a shot, or adding atmosphere, calculating light positions for recreating set lights in a 3D scene and reproducing motion capture without a motion capture stage and a Vicon system. This last bit is very close to the technology that ILM has developed for its work in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series.

The interface has had a facelift which makes it a little more colorful and feels like it lives at home in the world of Apple's OSX (which SynthEyes is available for, as well as Windows and Linux—with some caveats). There is a tiny bit of readjustment if you are a previous SynthEyes user, but the buttons are pretty much in the same place.

Tracking is an inherent part of the visual effects process and is absolutely essential to getting CG to incorporate into the live-action

plates. SynthEyes is able to get everything done for you that you need to get done. For beginners, the price point is well within reach, and the documentation is a good primer for anyone who wants or needs to understand the process.

Website: www.ssonetech.com

Price: \$399; upgrade: \$99

B&G Designs' Movie Forms Pro

Sometimes the really important stuff in life doesn't necessarily come in the coolest packages. Paying your car insurance, putting money into your 401K, or watching *American Idol*. So, in the same vein, not all of the software I look at is glitzy and exciting—but, they are important. Such is the case with a recent CD called *Movie Forms Pro* from B&G Designs, a company which has been providing software to the film and tape industry since 1985.

Anyone who has ever tried to put together a film, or even just worked in the office on the production side knows how much paperwork is behind all the creative stuff. Without the

standardization and organization, nothing would ever get done, much less in an efficient way. It would be terrific if this mountain of standard forms and templates could be found in one, easy-to-find place. That's really what this CD is all about—making it efficient to access the paperwork that will allow the film process run smoothly.

The CD provides a wide variety of different forms. For actual production, you have call sheets, slate templates, casting information, costume sizes, sound reports, contact sheets and more. For the business side, in the production office, you have tax forms, talent releases, petty cash expense reports, contractor agreements, and much more. They even provide templates for storyboards in three different layouts, and another for 1.85 aspect ratio. Post-production forms are also there for tape logs, cue sheets, time sheets and so forth. Beyond the business forms, you can also find signs for the actual production, like signs for the different departments, for the office doors (Director, Editorial, Producer); warnings



(Crew Only, Quiet Filming in Progress, Closed Set, No Parking) and more.

Movie Forms Pro is offered

as both interactive and traditional. The traditional version comes with forms that you simply print out, and then fill in the appropriate information, whereas Interactive provides the forms in the PDF file format that allows the data to be input electronically and printed out if necessary. Both are available from the website, the difference being that Interactive can be immediately downloaded, while the traditional version will be shipped to you on a CD. Yes, I realize that this isn't as sexy as 3D software or a Wacom tablet, but believe me when I tell you that these commonplace items are absolutely essential if you plan to get into filmmaking.

Website: www.movieforms.com

Price: Movie Forms Pro Interactive: \$149.99;

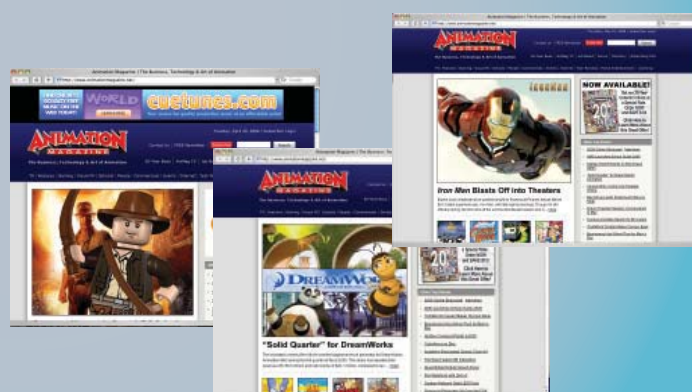
Movie Forms Pro Regular: \$59.99

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. He can be reached at ducky@maxinkcafe.com.

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Cause & Effects

Putting Pedal to the Mettle

The Wachowski brothers and their superstar vfx team give a bright anime polish to the live-action *Speed Racer*.

by Barbara Robertson

Nothing in *Speed Racer* is what you'd expect. Nothing, that is, unless you were a fan of TV series *Speed Racer* that helped launch anime in America in 1967. In keeping with that popular series and its progenitor, the Japanese manga *Mach GoGoGo*, writers/directors Andy and Larry (a.k.a. Lana) Wachowski drove their live-action version of *Speed Racer* using an anime joystick.

The film stars Emile Hirsch as racing fanatic Speed Racer. Christina Ricci plays his girlfriend Trixie, Matthew Fox is Racer X and Susan Sarandon and John Goodman are Mom and Pops Racer. The story centers on Speed's attempt to win the Crucible cross-country rally to burn past Royalton Industry's profit-making race fixing and save his parents' car racing business.

To give their live-action film an anime look and feel, the Wachowski brothers rallied many of the people who had

worked with them on *The Matrix* trilogy and *V for Vendetta*, including supervising art director Hugh Bateup, production designer Owen Paterson and co-visual effects supervisors John Gaeta and Dan Glass.

Gaeta received a visual effects Oscar and BAFTA award for the first *Matrix*; Glass shared the role with Gaeta on the second and third *Matrix* films and had supervised effects for *Vendetta*. Together, the duo assembled a visual effects pit crew of *Matrix* veterans and some of the best vfx practitioners in the business including Oscar nominee Kim Libreri of Digital Domain and Oscar winners Kevin Mack of Sony Pictures Imageworks and John Knoll of Industrial Light & Magic. Then, Gaeta and Glass convinced these effects maven to toss out much of what they'd learned about photorealistic visual effects and try something new.

"It's like Terry Gilliam meets *Sin City*

inspired by Miyazaki with a nod toward *The Matrix*," Gaeta says of *Speed Racer*. "It's a new universe; it's starting over." In this new, all-digital universe, CG cars battle with the agility of a one-ton kung fu master, and actors filmed on greenscreen stages inhabit virtual environments created from photographs that slip and slide like those filmed with a multi-plane camera. Gaeta calls the techniques "photo anime."

Car Fu

Pre-production work on the project began in June 2006. "We spent three months putting together ideas and visuals that fed the brothers as they wrote the script," Glass says. "They wanted a racing component, which in their minds was more akin to X Games or skateboarding. They suggested we play with ideas about how the cars could battle, which we termed 'car fu,' and how they could perform stunts in a vaguely believable way."

Once the design team had set the tone, Gaeta and Glass turned to former *Matrix* crew members Libreri and Mohen Leo, who were at Industrial Light & Magic at the time, to produce a four-minute teaser the brothers could show the studio. Freelance previz artist Euisung Lee, who had previz'd *Star Wars: Episode II* and *War of the Worlds*, and Colin Benoit, a layout artist at ILM, created the tracks and worked out the car fu moves.

continued on page 68

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Speed Racer

continued from page 66

For the extreme tracks, Lee created corkscrew turns, pipes and other configurations in Maya, many of which ended up in the final Grand Prix design. At Digital Domain, where a crew of more than 400 worked on more than 1,000 final racing shots for the Thunderhead and Grand Prix races, a procedural system helped animators keep the cars on the loopy tracks. "The cars automatically stay on the road surface unless you tell them to jump," says Libreri, who supervised the visual effects crew at Digital Domain.

To put drivers into the cars, the crew filmed actors on greenscreen stages in any of 20 cockpits built by Patterson's crew and mounted on motion-control bases. An onset crew supervised by Leo, who had moved into the role of digital effects supervisor at Digital Domain, drove the cockpits using Image Space's rFactor driving simulator, and,

erenced the original *Speed Racer*, and more recent Japanese anime. "You know in Japanese animation, they do a lot of pushing and pulling of the timing of the action," he says. "Someone runs full speed and throws a punch and then everything slows down and then picks up the pace. The brothers did that a lot in *The Matrix* and we did, too. We called it time remapping."

For example, BUF Compagnie, one of more than a dozen effects houses that worked on post-production, applied that technique to a shot of Speed's Mach 5 blasting past the camera during the rally race in the desert. "When the cars buzz by very fast, they're blurry," says vfx supervisor Olivier Dumont. "But, when the number 5 is in the middle of the shot, we injected a clear frame, one that wasn't blurry."

And, borrowing from 2D animation, Lee put the cars on conveyer belts and treadmills. "It's easier to animate cars in one place battling each other," he says.

Quicktime VR "bubbles." "John [Gaeta] especially was looking for ways to emulate the cartoon animation reality with live action," Lee says.

Teams of photographers traveled the globe capturing bracketed digital photographs that artists stitched together into HDRI spheres, often juxtaposing photographs from various locations into one image. By layering one sphere inside another and another and turning various areas transparent, the artists, in effect, created cut-outs between the layers. When they put a 3D character inside the sphere, they could, using a virtual camera, pan around the sphere to compose shots. By moving the layers, they created the illusion of motion and depth inside the sphere much like animators do using rostrum and multiplane cameras.

"Sometimes we'd slide a layer of the bubble along the axis of view to get the effect of lens change," says Lee, "and then we'd mix two lenses in one shot."

To drive the look even further away from photorealism, the artists creating the bubbles and those in the post-production studios who composited the final shots, experimented with extreme color saturation, focus and defocus to give the images a pop-artish graphic look. Similarly, the vfx artists added anime effects to the races. At Digital Domain, for example, artists created graphic looks for tire skids and smoke trails using scripted procedures in Houdini.

"One of the reasons I was really excited about this project is that when we were making the *Matrix* trilogy, I thought we were circling around the edges of so many ideas and inspiring concepts from Japanese animation and Hong Kong cinema," says Gaeta. "I was always hoping at some point to work on the next level of interpreting anime in a more literal sense."

And he has. As Imageworks' Kevin Mack puts it: "[*Speed Racer*] is another step toward the notion that films don't have to look like film any more." ■

Warner Bros' *Speed Racer* begins its U.S. theatrical race on May 9.



"It's like Terry Gilliam meets *Sin City* inspired by Miyazaki, with a nod toward *The Matrix*. It's a new universe; It's starting over."

—John Gaeta, co-vfx supervisor, *Speed Racer*

more traditionally, with animation data. In addition, the directors had joysticks they could use to bump the cars from different directions as they watched realtime composites of the drivers in CG cars thanks to General Lift's Encodacam system.

For the initial racing designs, Lee ref-

"And then when you turn on the textures, you get a relative sense of motion. We also used it for characters. The foreground recedes back and the backgrounds slide horizontally or vertically."

To create the backgrounds, the pre-viz artists and, later, various post-production crews worked with 360-degree

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Hal Hickel

Sweet Suit of Armor

For this month's much-anticipated *Iron Man* movie, ILM rethought a classic superhero's magnificent armor in three stages. **by Ron Magid**

The iconic superhero creation of the Vietnam era, Iron Man, was the brainchild of Marvel editor Stan Lee, writer Larry Lieber, artist Don Heck, who created the look of the characters, and artist Jack Kirby, who designed the power armor that is the superhero's trademark. After being gravely injured fighting Vietnamese agents in his first appearance in science fiction and supernatural anthology, *Tales of Suspense* #39 (March 1963), playboy businessman-turned-superhero Tony Stark (think Howard

Hughes) created the armor that saved his life and enabled him to protect the world from such super-creeps as Iron Monger.

Forty-five years later, Iron Man finally gets his cinematic due. Some things have changed (Stark is now injured fighting in Afghanistan) but director Jon Favreau has been surprisingly faithful and down to earth in his approach. "Jon was very frank about not being a big visual effects guy, which we all thought was a good thing, and he had a different vision for the film," says In-

dustrial Light & Magic's animation supervisor Hal Hickel (*Pirates of the Caribbean* trilogy), who found the director refreshingly collaborative. "Jon invited us to contribute to the film in a way none of us had experienced: Before shooting began, we worked with their pre-viz team contributing ideas, and after shooting they'd send a sequence to us and Jon would say, 'This may not be the best version of this sequence, there may be some better choices. If you guys want to re-cut it, we'll send the dailies up.' He wasn't going to adhere to some of the conventions, and he brought a lot of things to *Iron Man* that these movies are usually lacking."

Favreau's vision included three phases of Iron Man's power armor: the clunky, brutal, scrapped together Mark One Tony Stark builds to escape from his captors; the unpainted, burnished

metal Mark Two; and the red and gold Mark Three loaded with weapons and gadgets.

Following in the petrified footsteps of the original *Jurassic Park*, Stan Winston Studio built several practical Iron Man suits for actor Robert Downey Jr. and his stunt doubles to wear, which were seamlessly integrated with ILM's digital character. "We always argue for as much 'real' as possible so we have stuff to build on and we're not just making it out of whole cloth," Hickel says. "The practical suits are absolutely gorgeous and amazingly faithful to the comic book design, and they got some really nice hero shots of the character, but



suit designed for actor comfort. "The armor supposedly consists of overlapping metal plates, but the neck and the waist joints were essentially rubber sleeves, so when he turned his head or bent at the waist, they would wrinkle," Hickel explains. "You got away with that in some shots, but in others, we had to track CG elements to the neck and waist to make it look right. Rigging

hopefully they stop asking questions."

That philosophy even extended to shots of Downey wearing the iMocap suit and just a part of the practical suit, such as the helmet, which forced the team to further develop ILM's iMocap motion-capture system devised for Bill Nighy's Davy Jones character in *Pirates of the Caribbean 2* and 3. "On *Pirates*, we would track Bill's body motion in a scene, then apply that to our CG Davy Jones, which covered Bill completely. But if Robert's in the iMocap suit and he's got the practical helmet on, we were in a sense doing digital costuming, where we had to track the digital armor onto Robert's body. Just in terms of technical accuracy we had to up our game to match what Robert was doing. There were scenes where the action could've been done in the practical suit, but when Robert realized he didn't have to wear the armor, he preferred to wear the mo-cap suit."

Although definitely a pain in the armor, Downey's resistance may have been a blessing in disguise, especially as the Mark II and III versions revealed their hidden hardware. "There's a great sequence where the Mark II suit is about to fly for the first time," Hickel says, "and we cut directly between the practical suit and the CG suit. As the camera starts to circle around him, it really looks like the practical Mark II suit that the Winston guys built. But, then, all the control surfaces start to move, and you see all these mechanisms underneath and this glow from inside and it really tells you this thing is packed with technology. It's a great reveal, a nice moment to transition from one thing to another without suddenly being fake. I'm hoping audiences won't look at that shot and think, 'Oh that's a real suit and that's CG.' We didn't want to be so outrageous that nobody believes it, we just wanted to make whatever it is—wings unfolding or a weapon popping out—so cool and unexpected that their reaction is, 'Wow! That's great!'" ■

Paramount releases *Iron Man* in U.S. theaters on May 2.



"We didn't want to be so outrageous that nobody believes it, we just wanted to make whatever it is—wings unfolding or a weapon popping out—so cool and unexpected that their reaction is, 'Wow! That's great!'"

— Hal Hickel, ILM's director of animation for *Iron Man*

when the action started, Robert and the stuntmen's movements were really restricted inside. Sometimes we got them out of the suit completely, others they wore the part of the suit that was closest to camera."

Hickel notes that one big problem was that it was difficult for Downey Jr. to move his shoulders when he raised his arms because of the way the front and back torso pieces fit together. "But we wanted Iron Man to move like a superhero, so we animated that action when necessary," he adds.

ILM also massaged elements of the

those elements to not penetrate one another was quite a challenge for James Tooley and our creature team."

Ultimately, ILM's digital Iron Man armor may have been held to an even higher standard than Winston's suit. "I think that's really true," Hickel says. "There aren't a lot of practical suits in the film—but the nice thing about that is it keeps audiences guessing. Some shots are 100 percent suit, in some only a piece of the suit is real, and some are completely CG. If the writers and director are doing their job and really engaging the audience, at some point



A Day in the Life of Dinamo

Dinamo Productions, a 2D / 3D animation and vfx company based in Cardiff, U.K., is currently in pre-production on three new series. Let's pop in and see what they're up to ...



9:30



Yes, of course we all arrive at the same time (honestly)!

10:00



Jonathan heads up the morning production meeting.

We are currently in pre-production on *Grandpa in my Pocket* a live-action / animation series for CBeebies.

11:00



Lead animators Ben and Ryan prepare for the day.

16:00



Llyr works on texturing *Grandpa*.

17:30

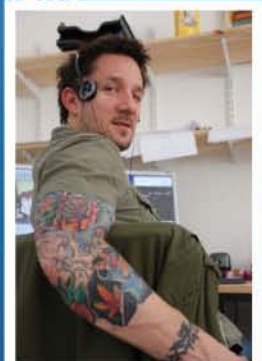


We're based in Cardiff Bay, a nice place to end the day :)



We are also developing a variety of projects in-house, some soon to go to the next stage, so watch this space!

12:00



Morgan: featuring arm doodles!

15:00



Jon heads up Visual Effects and stares into middle distance.

As well as series work, we also do visual effects including the title sequence and a number of fx shots for the upcoming film *Mutant Chronicles*

14:00



Owen, Hywel and Siwan discuss where to go for lunch.

13:00



Romano - Lead CG Animator and occasional Smurf.

Check out our previous work on our website www.dinamo.co.uk including our own 2D preschool series *Happy Valley*



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